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Issues of

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**Women in tourism**

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Development debate

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-An understanding

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**Equations**

Bangalore

September 1998

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Dossier

*Issues of Women in Tourism Development Debate: An Understanding*

September 1998

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## Introduction

Tourism is considered as one of the world's largest economic activities today. The Draft Tourism Policy 1997 sees the emergence of tourism as an important instrument for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environment regeneration and advancement of women and other disadvantaged groups in the country. The emphasis in the policy is also to see tourism as a reason for better preservation and protection of our natural resources, environment and ecology.

Research and studies have shown that the host communities have not been consulted while their resources are converted for tourism development. They have been deprived of their land, water and access to public places. Deeper analyses have made it evident that the effect of these deprivations exerts added pressure on women. For instance, the diversion of community resources like water for swimming pools, bathtubs, lawns etc, the inflation that takes place when tourists begin paying higher prices for necessities, scarcity and non-availability of goods that were once available etc. have direct impact on women who are the nurturers of the children, family and caretakers of the household. Government and industry seem to be oblivious to the fact that women are forgotten in the quest for globalisation and industrialisation. The Tourism industry also does not offer job opportunities that women can avail of. Few attempts have been made to examine the particular experience of women as hosts, entrepreneurs, craftspeople or even as observers of the tourist scene. But the debate on impact of tourism on women generally is limited to seeing women as victims, either in terms of sex work or advertising, which picture them as sex objects.

We have brought together a set of articles from the resources available at the Documentation Centre in EQUATIONS. We have made an attempt to cover a wide range of issues, which have a direct bearing on women in the tourism sector. The articles we hope, will provide an insight and understanding of the role women play in tourism, its impact on women and the critical need to look at tourism from the women's perspective.

*The EQUATIONS Team*



# UNDERSTANDING TOURISM PROCESSES: A Gender-Aware Framework

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*A gender-aware framework for the analysis of tourism development processes and tourism related activity is offered. The paper focuses on three crucial issues in the pursuit of such a framework. It is argued that, (1) tourism development processes and tourism-related activities are constructed out of gendered societies; (2) gender relations both inform, and are informed by the practices of all societies, and (3) power relations surrounding tourism development processes represent an extension of the politics of gender relations. It is concluded that an analysis of tourism-related activity can be enhanced by focusing on the dynamics of gender relations.*

The profound social implications of tourism development require an analytical framework which addresses social differentiation. Tourism involves processes which are constructed out of complex and varied social realities and relations that are often hierarchical and usually unequal. Gender relations are one element of this complex. Whether we examine divisions of labour, the social construction of landscape (both natural and human influenced), how societies construct the cultural 'other', or the realities of the experiences of tourist and host, it is possible to examine issues of relationships, differences and inequalities resulting from tourism-related processes in terms of gender relations. This allows us to concentrate on women's and men's differential experiences, constructions and consumption of tourism. It also permits us to formulate an analytical framework focusing on the ways in which: (1) tourism-related activity expresses gender relations, and (2) gender relations inform and articulate different forms of tourism activity. The aim of this paper is to provide a gender-aware framework through

which the various processes of tourism development and tourism related activity can be analysed. It is argued that, (1) tourism related activities and the processes involved in tourism development are constructed out of gendered societies; (2) gender relations both inform, and are informed by the practices of all societies; and (3) tourism's identification as an industry based on the economic, political or social power relations between nations or groups of people represents an extension of the politics of gender relations. We argue, therefore, that an analysis of tourism-related activity can be enhanced by focusing on the dynamics of gender relations in both host and guest societies.

## **A gendered framework**

Recognition of the centrality of gender as an organizing framework for conceptual analysis is a relatively recent phenomenon viewed as 'a principle organizing social arrangements, behaviour, and even cognition', gender is essentially structural and relational, and needs to be positioned within analyses which address systemic change over time.

This paper focuses on the principal conceptual issues which we consider to be crucial in establishing a gendered framework within which to better understand tourism

development processes and the implications of tourism related activity. Selected literature is employed to exemplify each element of this framework. We readily acknowledge that the examples used here are not exhaustive nor are they exclusive to each contention. The ideas presented and literature reviewed point to specific issues and concerns relevant to the discussion of the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism-related activity, all of which can be examined using a gender-aware analysis.

*1. The activities and processes involved in tourism development are constructed out of gendered societies. Consequently the masculine and feminine identities articulated by both host and guest societies are important components of the types of tourism taking place.*

We can begin to unravel the complexities of this statement by focusing attention on the gendered nature of tourism employment. Men and women tend to be segregated horizontally into different occupations, although the degree of segregation depends on the nature of the work: the greatest degree of segregation is found among the semi skilled, domestic and servicing type occupations, many mirroring functions carried out in the home. Women thus tend to remain concentrated in occupations which are predominantly female. Walby has argued that an understanding of the origins of gender segregation, and its maintenance at work, is the key to explaining women's subordinate position in the workforce.

Conventional explanations have implied that if the best jobs and highest

rewards are linked to an accumulation of human capital, women are inevitably disadvantaged because their process of accumulation is interrupted by, marriage, birth and childbearing. The position of women who continue to work- without such breaks and yet who remain in low-status, low-paid occupations is not explained by such conventional approaches. However, even where there is evidence of men and women starting with equal skills, qualifications or experience, the distribution of higher status and higher paid grades remain uneven. Cultural theories suggest that women make a rational choice about the type of work they pursue and that their choice derives from an adherence to values associated with femininity and domesticity. Such a position clearly fails to address the underlying causes determining women's choices.

Our understanding of the implications and structural consequences of employment in tourism related activity needs to be based on thoroughgoing critique of (1) the variations of quality and type of work activities available, (2) the differential access of men and women to such opportunities, (3) the seasonality of employment, and (4) the existing and new gender divisions of labour generated.

Recent studies have shown that in a number of regions where tourism-related activity is pursued as a stimulus to economic development - employment opportunities for the local population are typified by a predominance of unskilled, low-paid jobs such as kitchen staff, chambermaids 'entertainers' and retail clerks. As in most forms of employment, these categories of tourism work reinforce and transform gender divisions of labour with profound implications for women's potential income attainment, job security, work satisfaction, access to resources, social mobility and socioeconomic status.

A gender focus within the hotel and catering industry, in Britain, for example, depicts gender stereotyping and sex segregation at



different levels of activity: women are recruited into work which, is deemed to represent (an extension of) their traditional domestic responsibilities for which they will be inherently skilled. Although men are often employed as porters and stewards, they are over-represented in professional managerial and supervisory positions. Despite the potential improvements in economic status that women may attain as a consequence of involvement in tourism-related employment, strong cultural barriers, poor availability of government initiative, and the lack of organization among the women workers themselves constrain them from aspiring to political and communal leadership roles. Armstrong's research in highland Scotland, for example, found that although women were the main tourism workers, traditional male leadership and networking systems did not acknowledge leaders of established women's organizations as legitimate political figures. As a consequence, women had little influence beyond their own village.

In hotels in Barbados, most women employed were in less stable, lower status work, such as housekeeping, reception and other service occupations with the lowest job security (partly because of lack of unionized women workers) and income levels. In Sri Lanka, even women who owned and managed their own guesthouse or restaurant did not gain increased status, because of the low value ascribed, to women's work. In a number of developing countries, however, where the transformation from agriculture to manufacturing and service industry employment is often viewed positively, lack of equal employment opportunities

between women and men is rarely expressed. Early advocates of tourism as a strategy for development, viewed tourism employment a positive for integrating underprivileged sub-groups of society into the mainstream economy. Such notions however, may be seen as echoing stereotyped racist and sexist social ideologies and re-enforcing existing social stratification systems. They also create overt ethnic and gender divisions of labour within the tourism industry. Research on women and tourism in Bali and Western Samoa for example, has emphasized that women's roles in economic production cannot be understood without reference to the cultural context of women's structural position in society and the home, which may be advantaged or disadvantaged by such roles.

Lever's study, of Spanish migrant workers showed that much seasonal, unskilled low income and insecure tourism employment is undertaken by rural women who migrate as a result of poor rural employment opportunities. The exploitation of what is deemed women's work is again expressed: women are seen as 'cheaper' than men because, for example, they sweep and tidy, at the end of the day and perform other tasks which men refuse to do. While tourism migration may bring temporary improvement for individual migrants, it acts to postpone the need to address long-term rural development questions, not least employment provision for women.

In specific tourism-dependent regions of Britain and Ireland, economies are gendered in their inclusion of women in the tourism-related labour force. Issues of employment opportunities, in both historical and contemporary contexts, ghettoize women in work in a way which is seen to be an extension of domestic activity especially in relation to their

involvement in the provision of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Utilizing tourism as a strategy for development (and the gender



division of labour it reinforces) creates a situation in which women, otherwise marginalised in the workforce, are very much part of the prevailing capital and patriarchal social and economic structures. However, changing gender relations may be evident as women particularly, move their traditional domestic labour into the public domain. Women earn publicly and gain an element of financial autonomy through work that does not appear to threaten existing gender roles and can be accommodated within the prevailing sexual division of labour.

The gendered nature of tourists, the tourist experience and the tourist's structural role is but poorly researched and understood. Although studies addressing women's leisure have appeared since the 1970's, until recently they have tended to lack a gendered central organizing focus failing to evaluate leisure roles in relation to gender differences and inequalities within society. Two key issues appear to be crucial in such a debate, however: (a) women's experiences of time tend to be much more fragmented than those of many men, (b) women tend to be the facilitators of others (particularly husband's, children's, and parent's) leisure, and only secondarily the recipients of leisure themselves. Little research has focused specifically on distinguishing between the motivations of male and female tourists, and on the extent to which women organise/control their own and/or their family's leisure and tourism experiences in terms of timing, length, destination, accommodation, transport and actual leisure activities.

Recognition of the gendered nature of the motivation acts and aspirations of

travelling, however, has seen lately a proliferation both of anthologies of women travellers and of guides aimed at women who travel. Assessing the motivations of women travellers over a period of more than 200 years, Russell discerned a wide range of triggering factors, including the need to: (a) escape from domesticity or a routine job; (b) overcome a loss of emotional ties; (c) experience the thrill of danger; (d) demonstrate women's abilities, and (e) undertake scientific discovery. Certainly, changes in personal circumstance, whether a broken romance or marriage, death of a close relative or sudden inheritance, have often appeared to provide the releasing mechanism for women to embark on concerted travelling. In a study of young, educated, long term budget travellers, Riley found that women more than men said they wanted to travel to establish independence from their families and to feel comfortable with doing things alone.

Gendered patterns of travel and tourist wants are of direct interest to the tourist industry in that specific types of accommodation transport and activities could be developed to meet them. However, while some critics of mass, large-scale tourism development have advocated the pursuit of small scale, 'sustainable', 'alternative', 'responsible' or 'appropriate' tourism which is locally controlled, sensitive to indigenous cultural and environmental characteristics and directly involves and benefits the local population, gender considerations have yet to be placed centrally within such a debate.

In summary, access to tourism-related employment is overtly gender-based. There is evidence from the literature to suggest that the majority of menial jobs, especially those of low skill, wage and security are occupied by women. However, it is important to emphasize that the prevailing social and cultural norms regarding 'women's work' have underpinned this process and have permitted



it to take place. It seems that stereotyped perceptions of women's roles permeate transnational tourism organizations and diverse cultures and serve well the economic and political agendas of the transnational tourism industry.

2. *Gender relations both inform, and are informed by the practices of all societies. Therefore, economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental aspects of tourism related activity interact with the gendered nature of individual societies and the way in which gender relations are defined and redefined over time.*

The tourism literature has generated considerable debate over the social and cultural impacts of tourism-related activity. We can elaborate on a number of these issues to illustrate the overt way in which tourism arises out of the social and cultural interaction between host and guest societies, and the ways in which these activities are gendered.

As a process for development, tourism provides a strategy for economic and social change that has been widely debated within the framework of modernization. At the same time, however, the tourist's quest for the unique creates a demand for the traditional cultural 'other'. Discussions of tourism's relationship with authenticity, commoditization and the changing nature of the meaning of cultural arts is well documented. Yet, more recent comments suggest that an

analysis of the impacts of commoditization on those involved in the production of ethnic art depicts an understanding of how issues of gender, class and ethnicity, intertwine. Swain's analysis of the development of ethnic tourism among the Sani of China provides such an example. The government of China promotes ethnic tourism using exotic images of Sani women wearing traditional dress. In this instance, however, the commoditization of culture and tradition goes beyond the state-promoted image. Many Sani women are involved in the production of ethnic handicrafts and the marketing of them in nearby towns and cities. Sani men are employed in providing tourism services and support women's home craft production. The ways in which individual societies deal with the commercialization of their culture may be profoundly gendered, and women and men play different roles in the selling of their traditions. Whether we focus on the Kuna in Panama, the Sani in China's traditional dance in Bali, quilt making in Amish Pennsylvania, the production of tapa in Western Samoa, or the masculinization of heritage tourism in Stirling, Scotland, gender relations and roles are an important element of authenticity and tradition, and change in response to the demands of tourism development processes.

Another way in which to recognise tourism's interrelationship with social practices is through analyses of the family. Changing gender relations are expressed through the way in which tourism interacts with families and changing family structure. For example, family situations and household status which often determine women's access to employment opportunities. The demonstration effects of tourism development for the institution of the family vary according to geographical context. In the Caribbean, for example, Antrobus argues that a gender-aware focus within analyses of tourism development processes reminds us

that women's interaction with tourism has a more profound impact on the family than does that of men, because of women's position within the family. In Crete, Kousis found that thanks to mass tourism, change in rural family structure reflected more widespread control of decision making among family members and the possibility, of increased autonomy for women. However, determining that economic rather than cultural factors induced change she suggested that profound, gendered practices such as the importance of marital arrangements, and the dowry system had lost little of their significance. Further, the development of relationships between local men and female tourists required a revision of local moral codes, which, only applying to male Cretans, thereby widened the gap of behavioural 'norms' between local men and local women.

In Mexico, Chant found incidences of female headed households more dominant in areas of readily available tourism employment. Here, women found economic autonomy, and the ability, to better control their own family environment. We urgently require systematic analyses of such potential interactions between factors of change, the local sociocultural context and family relations in which gender is centrally positioned.

Appreciation of the environment is socially constructed both temporally and spatially, and one way in which we 'see' the environment is based on the changing economic, social and geographical organization of leisure and tourism. However, while issues relating to the gendered nature of the construction of environmental values are well recognized, the ways in which they relate to processes of tourism development have yet to appear in the

literature. Research which deconstructs environmental values through gender, class and race differences would provide a valuable contribution to an understanding of the significance and roles of the environment within tourism development processes.

Many of the social and economic processes noted are a result of the movement of large numbers of people from one place to another, carrying with them different sets of motivations, preconceptions and desires to 'find something new'. Host/guest relations involve at least some exchange of social and economic values. The extent to which these exchanges take place and their degree of symmetry depends on the nature and context of interaction between host and guest, not least in terms of the underlying ideology of the host regime and its structuring of the tourism industry relative levels of social and economic development of host and guest societies, type of tourist, and form of tourist-related activity. Unless tourism is managed in a comprehensively 'prescribed' manner, some form of interaction will always take place, and the ways in which resulting changes in social and economic value systems are gendered is significant.

The issues raised under the first two points are reinforced through our third contention.

*3. Discussions of gender and gender relations are concerned with issues of power and control. Gender relations are political relations at the household, community and societal levels. Identifying tourism as an industry based on the economic, political or social power relations between nations or groups of people represents an extension of the politics of gender relations. As such, tourism revolves around social interaction and social articulations of motivations,*



*desires, traditions and perceptions, all of which are gendered.*

International processes of tourism development have been perceived by, some as part of global economic and political power relations inevitably involving some degree of power and control by, one group over another. Indeed, tourism is often seen as a mechanism for the incorporation of developing countries into an essentially exploitative global economic system, or is linked to the colonialism and political economy of North-South relations. Such discussions provide insight into the explanation of concepts of international economic and political power relations within international tourism. However, power relations also exist within national tourism and are focused much more acutely at the local level within issues of race, class, and gender.

We can elaborate on this issue using the following two subthemes. First, in any society, gender relations are constructed out of the varied social realities involved in the complex network of social interaction and control. If we accept that the tourism industry and tourism-related activity involve articulations of power and control, then we must be able to rethink our analyses of tourism-related impacts at the local level and look for ways in which societal differences embody the (re)presentation of the politics of gender relations.

The ways in which dominant (power) structures dictate tourism policy can be reflected in the way in which tourism is presented in different places. Edensor and Kothari have highlighted the

promotion of tourism through an appreciation of Scottish heritage and nationalistic pride which is configured exclusively by one - in this case white, heterosexual male - set of values, emphasizing battle and a warrior ethic. By contrast, in Western Samoa, Fairbairn-Dunlop argues that while, as elsewhere, tourism has tended to commoditize traditional beliefs and practices, women possess well defined rights and resources derived from those very traditions, which have permitted them skillfully to identify and exploit opportunities to dominate the tourism industry, from a position of strength. Here, for both women and men, a widespread fear is that tourism's global power structures will undermine traditional Samoan customs, and with them the complementary, gender-influenced organization of Samoan tourism and values of hospitality.

Swain's research on the Kuna of Panama and the Sani of Yunnan, China, not only exemplifies the control of tourism policy by dominant power structures, but also depicts the ways in which those structures interact with, and reinforce broader (western) economic and political agendas within the tourism industry. She concludes that although women in both societies have derived some measure of economic independence and empowerment, from their participation in tourism development they remain 'exoticized female images of the other, with little real power in their distinct state societies'. In the case of the Kuna of Panama, women produce *mola* artwork, a traditional fabric handicraft and although they sell it in local markets men control the commodity's wholesaling in urban centres and generally define the political and economic forums and structures through which the community, interacts with tourists. This is not to say, that processes involved in tourism-related activity, always reinforce gender differences and inequalities. All processes of development and societal change

are, however, constructed out of different social relations which inevitably embodies power, inequality and control and are dynamic in their use of gender relations. What, therefore, does tourism development mean for women and men in different societies? Second, the relationships, consequences and eventual configuration of the tourism experience for hosts and guests is gender specific. The differential effects of tourism as a strategy for development are evident in our conceptualization and analyses of the implication of tourism-related activity. In addition, the way in which all societies, whether host or guest, embody a changing set of gender perceptions, stereotypes and relations, and articulate these as part of their individual understanding of 'reality', has implications for the marketing of tourism: for the motivation of guests to visit and for hosts to entertain. For example, the advent of sex-tourism, which has been widely discussed within the sociocultural impact literature, is overtly concerned with female/male (or male/male) host/guest encounters. This form of tourism-related activity, has flourished in societies which have a particular set of gender/power relations. These relations are often steeped in historical traditions which interact with the modernization and globalization of local and national economies and societies. Female prostitution in developing countries signifies the continuous interplay between the new international division of labour and the manipulation of the sexual division of labour. The popularity of organized sex package tours in Southeast Asia, especially among Japanese male tourists has been viewed as representing an economic power relation reflecting a long history of class, gender and race

relations within the region. According to Kikue, South Korea's notoriety as a destination for Japanese sex-tourists is partially due to Japan's former colonization of the Korean peninsula and the racist overtones this implies. The phenomenon in developing societies of male hosts interacting with female tourists is as yet poorly researched. The ideological constructs of the advertising industry constructing and diffusing fantasy, meaning and identity - infuse the tourism industry, not least the representation of women. Images of First World women tourists and Third World women tourism hosts are frequently compared and contrasted: the latter as submissive, for the benefit of male tourists, the former, potent, yet independent.

In summary, the way in which gender roles and relations are represented in the process of tourism development is an aspect of political power sharing which is readily seen at the local level. The differential experiences of women and men, and their social interaction with others as either hosts or guests, is dependent upon the particular construction of gender relations in any society and how they change over time. Examples of women's role and position in tourism-related employment (including the sex tourism industry), in representing culture and tradition, and in their motivations for engaging in tourism-related activity (as either hosts or guests) attest to this claim. The involvement of women in new tourism enterprises in Ireland, for example, is accepted in a society where, historically women's work has been intensely controlled. The view of a woman as wife, mother and the carer for others has remained dominant in Irish society. Consequently, the extension of this role into providing lodgings for tourists is acceptable and does not challenge the prevailing notions of gender roles and relations.



## Conclusion

Unless we understand the gendered complexities of tourism, and the power relations they involve, then we fail to recognize the reinforcement and construction of new power relations that are emerging out of tourism processes. From the values and activities of the transnational tourist operator to the differential experiences of individuals participating as either hosts or guests, all parts of the tourism experience are influenced by our collective understanding of the social construction of gender.

Tourism-related activity is one of a number of projects of (re)presentation which are undertaken through the perceptions and motivations of the tourist in relation to the nature and articulation of the tourism product as defined by the host in conjunction with a variety of marketing agents. Therefore, tourism development and the generation of various forms of tourism-related activity in a particular place is a two-way process which is dependent upon the social relations present in both host and guest societies. Attention to these social relations is required in order that we may reveal the ways in which they are used and change over time as a result of tourism development. The tourism literature reveals case studies which highlight the ways in which societal constructs and practices cut across conventional categories of tourism analysis. Consequently, it is difficult to look at the economic impacts of tourism without an integrated discussion of their social and political implications. Similarly, an analysis of the social and cultural changes inherent in the processes of tourism development requires an

understanding of different social and cultural practices within particular societies, the ways in which these practices interact with others as either hosts or guests, and the reconstructed and reconstituted social relations that emerge from the process.

The social implications of processes of tourism-related activity and development demand an analytical framework which addresses differences within societies. A gender-aware framework moves us towards this goal and suggests an agenda for further debate.

## Acknowledgements

*The authors would like to thank: first, the anonymous referee for her/his helpful comments and support; commented on an earlier version of the paper when it was presented in January 1995 at the Institute of British Geographers Annual Conference, University of Northumbria at Newcastle; and third, the editor of Tourism Management for her encouragement.*

**- Vivian Kinnaird, Derek Hall, *Tourism Management*, Vol 17, No.2, 1996**

## Women and Tourism: Invisible Hosts, Invisible Guests

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Few outside the burgeoning tourist industry defend the over development of the South for the pleasure of the Northerner seeking the formula of "sex, sea, sand and sun." Not only have host communities not been consulted about the use of their resources and the appropriation of their culture, but their land, water, and access to public places have been taken away in many tourist centres, often over their strenuous objections. Long after the damage has been done in many parts of the world, the impact of tourism is being described and catalogued -- but only up to a point. To the extent that women have been considered at all in the debate about tourism, is generally as victims, either in terms of sex work or advertising which portrays them as sex objects. Few studies examine the particular experience of women as hosts, entrepreneurs, craftspeople, or even as observers of the tourist scene.

This essay looks first at why so much attention has been paid to sex tourism, then reflects on the few studies which look at the many other impacts of tourism on women. Our intention is that the information be used as a starting point for future research, analysis, strategy and action to be taken by policymakers, community activists, and academics. Ultimately, the hope is to learn more about what really happens to women in tourist areas, and spread the word so that:

- the damage tourism has already done to women can be understood and mitigated
- future development can be designed in a way that includes women and their interests from the very beginning
- policy guidelines can be developed so that tourism development can be as constructive for women as possible, and
- women's experience in one community can be conveyed to those in another, to help them make better decisions.

Virtually all of the attention to the female half of the host countries has been focused on sex tourism (both independent and organized tours). Why? There are certainly constructive reasons, but some of the criticism is based on Northern stereotypes of Southern women as helpless victims on the one hand, and on the other as sensationalized, lascivious whores ready to fulfill every male fantasy. Sex tourism outrages such a broad race of political bedfellows. Feminists, nationalists, religious organizations both locally and internationally, community members who are fearful of change angered over the way women have been used. Righteous indignation spouts both from the defenders of the purity of womanhood and those who seek rights and liberation. Coming from competing different and often conflicting perspectives, the critics of sex tourism converge to oppose it. The root causes are so deep, however, that few would say much progress has been made, and some indicate that the sex trade is livelier than ever. Reformism will have little effect until women have real occupational alternatives to the "quick buck" of prostitution.



Some parallels between tourism and prostitution have been noted by Shubhendu Kaushik and others: a natural urge satisfied unnaturally, profit by the middleman, money as the driving force, and degradation of the buyer. The issues seem to be even deeper. Sex tourism is a powerful symbol of what has happened to host communities. Even though tourists are a relatively small percentage of clients in many "destinations," they contribute disproportionately to the economy, and their presence may lure women in with the hope of escape (Walter Meyer). Prostitution within a community is unfortunate enough, but it has different implications when tourism is involved, not only in scale and stakes. Tourism represents the commodification not only of a particular culture, but of women's role as nurturer and caretaker, the all giving -- taken to the extreme in sex tourism, in which the woman's actual body is sold.

When women are up for sale to outsiders, especially for a price which is cheap to them, the community has lost something irretrievable. Unfortunately, it is often cast in terms of males losing access to the sexual services of females as being an outrage to their manhood, rather than women's having no other viable economic options as being an outrage to their womanhood. The prostitution of women also represents the loss of something private and sacred, for female reproductive power was worshipped before anything else on earth. If tourism policy is a signal to the North that a country is ready to meet tourist's expectations (Cynthia Enloe), surely sex tourism is the ultimate concession or selling out.

Even in the Northern context there is controversy about prostitution - whether it is simply degrading to women, or whether it is a valid way for a woman to make an independent living doing what others do as

unpaid work. It is difficult, however, to make a case that the bar girl in Manila or the streetwalker in Bangkok is in any way in control of the rural poverty which drove her into her job, or the system which keeps her there. While she may feed her family and have some years of relatively lucrative employment, she is in a death trap in the long run. She earns, but at the price of her health, her self respect, and the recognition usually available to women in her society.

In the context of the tourism Industry, the steadiest, least seasonal, and by far the most lucrative opportunities for women are in sex work. It is tedious, a health hazard, can be degrading and dangerous, and is characterized by a downward career path. But for a Southern woman pressed by necessity, caught between the ideal of female sexual purity and the ideal woman's providing food for her family, there are few other choices. Once in the system, her fate is often sealed, and it is no surprise that many conceal the true nature of their work from their families, and even from themselves (Kathryn Poethig). In many ways, the commercialization of sex is a metaphor for the inauthenticity of the guest/host relationship, in that it is an attempt to buy and sell what really cannot be bought and sold. In spite of everything, however, some real relationships do develop in both situations (Erik Cohen).

The prostitution of women is simply at one end of a continuum of service activities provided for tourists, and, as the extreme, it has attracted more comment than the more palatable forms of prostitution: the hotel manager who is anticipating and catering to the tourists every whim; the packaging of a traditional dance or festival; the modification of handicrafts so they appeal to the Northern taste; the ad which depicts an air hostess's compliant smile. The only difference is degree, not kind. Some of the criticism of sex work



undoubtedly stems from a legitimate concern for women's welfare. But much is based instead on outrage that women are violating the standards of female purity, that they are earning their own money and have, to varying degrees, escaped the control of their families.

Sex tourism deserves significant attention because it unites diverse constituencies against a common problem, it symbolizes what happens to host communities, and is the most extreme and obvious form of prostitution. Anyone who cares about women is outraged by it. Action is needed, and needed urgently. Yet tourism affects women in many, many ways other than pushing them into sex work. In the flurry of outrage over prostitution, the much commoner, more everyday and less extreme effects have been noticed only glancingly.

For example, critics rightly decry the diversion of community water supplies to hotels so that tourists can over consume in swimming pools, bathtubs, lawns, and so on. The resulting lack of water for the hosts themselves may be protested, or even the worse quality of the drips which remain. But few have taken the next step, to notice and object to the fact that it is a local woman who must pay the price for the tourist's luxuries. It is she who must go farther and farther to find smaller and smaller amounts of water, who must carry less over greater distances. She is the one who must make do with less in cooking and in washing herself and her children. Her working day, often already overextended to include paid as well as unpaid work, is lengthened further.

It's particulars like these which must be observed, understood and analyzed if future strategies for tourism are to assist women rather than burden them further. In areas where tourism has already run

riot, advocates need to include the costs and benefits to women in their calculations about appropriate remedial action. Where new development is being considered, women must not only be thought about, but they must have a voice in the process. When critics of tourism advocate consulting the community, they must mean women as well as men -- and those women need to have access to the experience of others elsewhere to help them make good decisions.

Remarkably little attention has been given to the full range of issues concerning women and tourism: the roles the industry creates for women, women fighting tourism development, women shaping tourism policy and practice, and how tourism affects women. Basic questions remain virtually unexplored:

- What are the roles which the tourism industry creates for women? The information available indicates that the roles are very similar to those in Northern economies: primarily service jobs, often seasonal, invariably low waged and perhaps temporary as well. The only decently paid work to which most women have access is sex work, and it involves numerous disadvantages. The coercion of poverty, which drives women into many forms of substandard employment in the tourist industry, operates more strongly on women, who are poorer than men the world over.
- What part are women playing in restraining tourism? In communities around the South, people are objecting more and more strenuously to unthinking tourist development and practices. Who are the women leaders



in that movement? What role do women play at the global level in addressing tourism issues? If their perspectives are fully heard and incorporated into the overall agenda of transforming tourism surely the issues will be defined more comprehensively, in a way that includes gender as an important variable. A basic question never asked is a variant on the classic- "What do women want from tourism?" Are they looking merely for income? Is it the possibility of marrying a foreigner and escaping poverty, like the Thai sex workers (Erik Cohen)? Is it a glimpse of another world - just such a glimpse as the tourist him or herself seeks?

- To what extent are women shaping tourism, as policy makers, managers, owners, guests, workers and service providers? Each of these deserves a study of its own. While women are probably a tiny minority in the more powerful roles, the underside of the iceberg gives it shape at least as much as the tip, and women are all too well represented as air hostesses, chambermaids, waitresses, and other "invisible" occupations (Cynthia Enloe). As guests, women are almost unstudied (Valene Smith), even though there is ample evidence that they are critical decision makers in travel destinations, and have somewhat different priorities than male tourists. While we know a lot about male guest's fantasies of paradise, how much do we know about women's? The meaning of the tourist experience is different for them. To some extent, a tourist destination is a place where men of one class can enjoy the privileges of men of another class, and women can enjoy the privileges of

men. Someone else will cook their meals, make their beds, and clean their toilets. In some places, like the Gambia, women can also solicit male prostitutes, or, probably much more commonly, take their pick among the many host men who show an interest. Now there are even women pedophiles (Ron O'Grady). Are these women simply playing out male fantasies, or is something deeper and more authentic involved?

- How does tourism affect women in terms of their daily lives and activities, their opportunities for health and prosperity, and their roles? How does it affect their status, both as their own community sees them, and as women striving for self-sufficiency worldwide might see them? Thus far, it seems that tourism is a double-edged sword for women, as it is for men; it both gives and takes. The information collected so far indicates that women often pay the costs of tourism disproportionately, while reaping few of the benefits. On the one hand, tourism does provide a chance for the fisherwomen in Goa to earn some money by renting her hut to tourists for which she is grateful. It may improve her status in the community because she is a more important contributor to family income, but she may instead be seen as a kind of prostitute. Tourism has the potential both to degrade and to improve women's status. The threat of the latter is so great that, in some cases, governments and industries have been involved in elaborate machinations to ensure that the employment through tourism will not challenge the status quo. The Maltese government actually enacted a law prescribing sex discrimination in favor

of men because too many low waged jobs had been created for women; one employer paid wages to girls fathers to ensure that male authority was not challenged.

From the moment tourism enters a community, women are positioned differently than men to take advantage of whatever opportunities or benefits it offers. They are generally less schooled, less likely to know a truly "foreign" language, less comfortable dealing with the world outside. And yet they are also among the most useful pawns the industry has to move to the front of the board to attract the Northern male tourist, depicting them as compliant, submissive, and ultimately accommodating. Once tourism goes beyond the point of a few individual adventurers, virtually every woman in a community is affected by tourism, whether she ever sees a tourist or not, whether she works in the industry or not, and whether she can identify tourism as the source of what she observes or not.

If the information gathered so far is typical, the ordinary woman outside the industry pays higher prices for necessities, because tourists have driven them up; faces scarcity or exorbitant prices for goods she once considered normal; is restricted in her movements because of explicit banning of "natives" or because of her reluctance to expose herself to harassment; and is trying to make pay that never increases stretch farther. Researchers and activists should examine the effects of broad tourism policies and actions -- such as tax breaks for hotel and infrastructure development, or manipulation of the exchange rates - on women's daily lives. As important as those quotidian impacts are, the overall effect of tourism on women is more than

the sum of those parts. Women's roles can be deeply affected, for better and for worse.

We need a much better understanding of where and how tourism actually has helped women to lead better lives, as opposed to the all too familiar stories of prostitutes ravaged by drugs. What has benefited women? Can petty trading help improve women's lives? If so, how can they be enabled to do it? What chance do women have of moving into hotel or restaurant management? What enables them to keep control of the money they earn?

From a Northern view, it is easy to construct a romanticized view of a female petty trader on the beaches of Goa, selling traditional handicrafts produced under ideal conditions in a comfortable country cottage. Surely she has opportunities because of tourism which would not have presented themselves otherwise. But does she have control over her own money? Does her community see her with more status and respect, or is she despised for pandering to foreigners (Shireen Samarasuriya)? Turning to the women making the handicrafts, what are the conditions of their work? What benefit do they reap from their labor, as opposed to the middleman and the petty trader? Are they seen as significant contributors to family income? What is the wage gap between their earnings as men's, and how does that affect their value in the community? How can the community's concepts of what is appropriate for women be changed, so that it is possible for women to benefit from tourism -- or is that one more imposition of outside values and norms? These are the subtleties that must be explored situation by situation, even village by village: If we are to come to an understanding of what tourism has already done to women, and of what women have



done to tourism, and of what can be done in future so that the waves of tourism will carry women forward rather than drown them.

It would certainly be possible simply to advocate obtaining for women a fairer share of the benefits of tourism as it now exists. Instead, asking fundamental questions about women should also involve a much broader evaluation of the industry and how it has developed thus far. Strategies to help women benefit from tourism can improve the industry. If, for example, one of the criticisms of tourism as it exists is that there is so little realistic communication between guest and host, women would be ideal "bridge people," as they are in other realms of life. Because women in many cultures are socialized to be gregarious, to develop sophisticated interactive skills and to assess and meet others needs, they could make ideal tourist educators and guides.

To speculate about what keeps them from moving in that direction, the fear of contamination due to contact with foreigners comes immediately to mind. Women themselves need to be consulted about the best ways to overcome those barriers: for example, a licensing system, the use of uniforms, and public recognition might help. At another, more practical level, obstacles include not knowing foreign languages or being unfamiliar with cultural differences, and the communication and other potential problems they imply. Yet English, often the language of foreign tourists, is child's play compared to many local languages, and people living in diverse countries are often multilingual. Teaching English as a foreign language can readily be done in a way that also familiarises participants with other cultural realities. Women can be

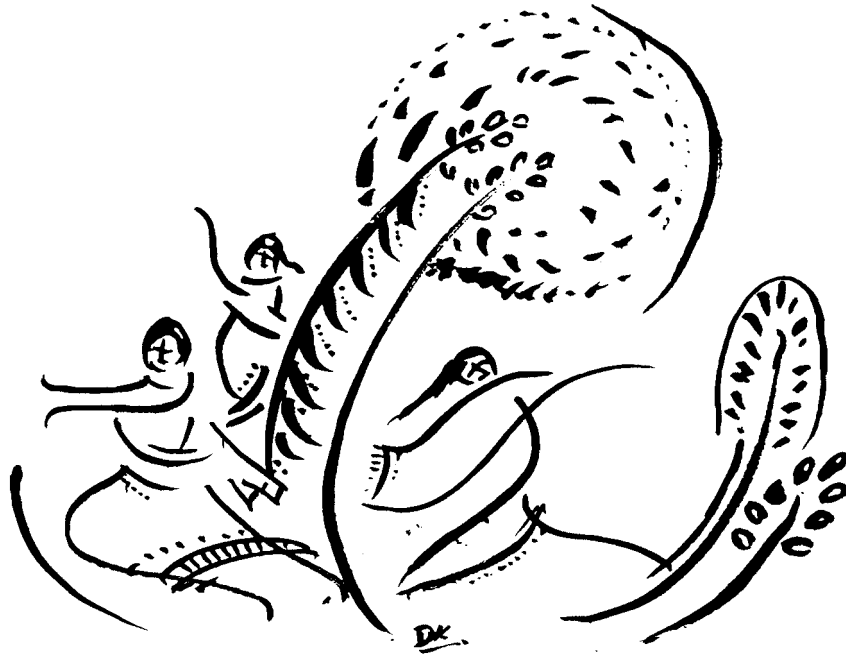
part of the solution, not just part of the problem.

While there has been some attention to women's issues other than sex work by tourism's critics, and some attention to tourism by women's groups, few would argue that there has been enough of either. A change is timely. Women's concerns are just as deeply linked to the environmental issues now most popular in the agenda of the critics (A. Sreekumar), as they were to the cultural impacts which received more attention earlier. Women tend those who become ill because of degraded water or air; they bear the brunt of most reproductive effects of toxic substances. They go from well to well, and are the cleaners and sweepers who must cope somehow with increasing solid waste. They are the ones who must make do in the market with the leavings of tourists, whose rituals connecting them to the earth may become the subjects of photographs or even displays.

Thus far, the balance of the impact of tourism on women has almost unquestionably been negative overall. As we move toward a world where tourism is an ever greater force for change, it will take the efforts of both tourism's critics, and women's advocates, to begin to use the enormous economic and social resources of tourism as positively as possible.

## POSTSCRIPT

Beyond the question of how tourism affects women is the larger issue of how tourism fits into interconnected gender, race and class oppression. One commonly held view is that tourism has evolved parallel to earlier colonial patterns of economic dependency, and is merely imperialism's latest manifestation (John Lea). If one takes the view that all oppressions are intertwined it's worth



examining tourism as a tool and expression of patriarchy, as Cynthia Enloe begins to do. Feminist scholars and theorists could certainly afford to amplify her and others' analysis.

As an example of looking at tourism through the feminist lens, consider what the tourist seeks. The tourist's desire is usually to be indulged like a child - being cooked for, having one's bed made, being free to indulge one's appetites at will, to play all day and stay up late at night if one wishes. In every culture across the world, a return to childhood means being taken care of by The Mother. Thus, entire host communities play the role of The Mother to a tourist whose regression and artificially amplified wealth makes him or her feel entitled to demand almost anything. The Mother is endlessly indulgent and appears to have no needs or timetable of her own, and enforces no rules.

How much of the outrage against tourism stems from men being coerced into

playing female service roles with respect to tourism? As Cynthia Enloe points out, there is often much more objection to the idea of a nation of busybodies as opposed to a nation of chambermaids. What's profoundly objectionable about tourism as is currently structured is that it forces whole communities into the same unacceptable position as women in most societies: a subordinate role in which the hosts' needs must be ignored and subsumed, the entire structure of life is geared primarily to satisfying the tourist's whims, and the dignity of the hosts must be sacrificed. Just as male values, styles, priorities, activities and work are valued more than women's in most contemporary societies so the tourist has greater weight than the host. The values of the tourist are seen as better; he has more, therefore he must be and deserve more. Transistor radios thus penetrate into small African villages, and cellular telephones appear in Bombay airport.

-- Mary Fillmore - *EQUATIONS* Monograph, 1994



# Commoditisation and Commercialisation of Women in Tourism: Symbols of Victimhood

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*Nina Rao*

Gender discrimination in India today is being presented as an aberration in the inexorable drive towards development. Despite the attempts of the Government to promote the view that the new economic thinking is gender sensitive, the ideological and cultural changes that are coming in the wake of the process of globalization are denying the space that women in India had created through their struggles and through their participation in several significant mass movements. The denial of this space is being projected as the only route to modernisation, and the prices we have to pay for modernity is the process of structural adjustment. In many Asian countries which embarked on these processes before us we have seen that essentials have become unavailable, poverty has been enhanced and unemployment has made survival a day-to-day struggle for sections of the people described as under-developed, marginalised etc. Amongst these groups and in society as a whole, in the process of globalisation we have seen women emerge as symbols of victimhood.

Global tourism offers us many illustrations of this victimhood. Where the 45's formula is the invisible export for hard currency hungry power elite being manipulated by the irrationality

of market forces. International organisations, financial institutions and the travel trade have acquired a mythological status and our governments submit, with a sense of inevitability, to the dictates of the World Tourism Organisation, PATA, ASTA, ITB etc. This is because the mythological stature of these key ideological institutions manipulate consumption around exercise. This is done through setting impossible targets to net the 558 million international tourists who form the market and the competition now lists the top ten destinations as well as the top ten earners of the tourist 'dollar'. There is even a formula for being declared a 'destination' - a country which earns 10% of its GDP from tourism.

Tourism is legitimised as the human need to recreation. What this statement ignores is the fact that tourism has grown out of gendered societies which inform all aspects of tourism development and activity and all these processes embody gender relations. Our diverse and complex social structures, economic, social, cultural, political and environmental are conditioned by gendered relations. Tourism engages in all these structures in the process of its change, with consequences for the marginalised individuals and communities that become a part of its structure. The impact of tourism on gender has only recently been studied by social scientists, although the cultural construction of gender, in combination with the variable of race is only now being looked at. In the area

factors, and access to resources and politics. However, I was still left wondering why there was no deeper analysis of where women featured in all of this and wanting to know what tourism development means for women. The crucial and missing ingredient for me was how women perceived these complex linkages and how they saw themselves in relation to them.

I was convinced from my own observations that women are not all passive victims within the tourism industry. For example, a study carried out in San Cristobel, Mexico, showed that local women welcomed the arrival of western styles of dress, such as T-shirts and underwear, even though the attitudes of both their men folk and the tourists encouraged them to continue to wear their traditional dress.

The women were quick to learn that tourists were more likely to buy handicrafts from them if they wore traditional clothing. They therefore chose to compromise by wearing non-indigenous clothing beneath their traditional wear, which they took off once at home. The existence of women's groups such as Bailancho Saad in Goa, actively negate the stereotype of the 'passive' female victim in destination areas. A further example is the women's agro-tourist cooperative in Greece, described by Maria Castelbourg-Koulma, where women in rural areas have opportunities to earn money for themselves directly from tourism.

Such examples show it is misleading to talk about women in general. There needs to be research which analyses how different women living in the same society can and do have differing experiences of tourism development.

For instance, a study of South India showed how migrant women successfully increased their earning potential as fruit sellers and petty-traders on the beaches, as compared to local women. Local women had fewer opportunities to earn money directly, as the beach mats they made at home to sell to tourists were then sold for a higher profit by young middlemen. The migrant women, in turn, gained respect from visiting Indian tourists who were amazed to see mainly low caste women interacting so successfully with foreign tourists. And such activities are not restricted to women - I met a young three-year-old from Karnataka on her first day of selling fruit on a beach in Goa.

### **Access to resources**

Through my discussion with both Bailancho Saad and local and migrant women, I was given numerous examples where access to local resources is restricted as a result of tourism development. In Goa, it is common for groups of young girls or older women on festival days to enjoy picnicking on the beaches. Because of the rapid growth in mass tourism in this area and because many of the luxury hotels have illegally denied local people access to the beaches, the women can no longer do this. If they do go on to the beaches, they are faced with scenes of near or total nudity from the tourists. A couple of years ago, Bailancho Saad undertook some direct action in response to this and organised a 'dress-up' campaign, where local women walked along the beaches asking the tourists to put their clothes back on. The issue of access to beaches for local people, both men and women, is by no means confined to Goa but is a problem in many destination countries.

Tourism development also affects access to other natural resources. This is felt most acutely where tourist demand makes use of already limited resources. In most of these



destination areas, the collection of water and fuel is defined as women's work. This means that women are now having to spend longer at wells or to walk further to collect fuel. Additionally, they may be spending more time at the market negotiating over the price of food as prices tend to inflate during the tourist season as restaurants and hotels pay higher prices and corner the market.

### **Women's work**

Even if these women are not living in or near to the tourism development areas, they may find that their responsibilities to their families and to the community increase because their men have migrated to the tourism areas for work. This is often referred to in the literature on women and development as the 'double' or even 'triple' burden for women (as women have responsibility for production of food, reproduction and the care of children, as well as reproduction in the sense of the wider community).

In terms of paid employment, it is often assumed that tourism as a service industry brings increased opportunities for women. My research shows that there are numerous studies and official documentation to support this belief. A World Tourism Organisation report, in 1988, argued that tourism has the potential to generate substantial employment for less privileged groups such as women and youth. A report by the United Nations a year later on women and development highlighted the service industry as one in which there exists a high concentration of women from developing countries. They pointed out a regional variation in

this and cited Asia as having the highest concentration of women in this sector. However a survey conducted by the International Labour Organisation discovered a very different scenario.

Their survey showed that men tend to predominate in the formal sector of the tourism industry. In many developing countries, with women comprising only a small percentage of those employed: 2.98 per cent in India, 14.9 per cent in Sri Lanka, but rising to over 35 per cent in the Caribbean and Latin America. It is highly likely that the same survey carried out in this country or any other so-called 'developed' country would produce similar results.

One of the problems with trying to assess the employment opportunities for women arising out of tourism development is that many such opportunities never appear in the official statistics, as women are more likely to be found in the 'informal' sector. Such jobs include washing clothes for tourists, petty trading, cooking for or looking after the children of other women officially employed in the tourism industry or providing other 'services', such as massages on the beach or sexual services. At a people's conference in Thailand, a female caddie talked about her work, for which she gets paid approximately £3 per day, and of the 'extra services' young Thai women are now forced to offer as caddies. A further problem arises out of seasonal fluctuations and women may move in and out of both formal and informal employment at different times of the year.

Certain types of formal employment within the tourism industry are defused as being more suitable for women, such as reception work and chambermaiding. It is often assumed that women possess the necessary skills naturally and they are therefore not recognised as 'skills'. Consequently, this work is given lower status and therefore lower wages. As in other industries, large



transnational tourism corporations are quick to find out that defining work as women's work helps keep costs down. Obviously cultural and ideological factors play a part in how work is defined. Very often the only work available for women in the tourism industry is not deemed to be acceptable by their families and the wider community. For example, in many parts of the Mediterranean it may be more acceptable for women to rent out rooms at home to tourists than it is for them to go and work in hotels.

The few studies that do exist on women in the tourism development process illustrate clearly that it is far too easy to generalise about its effects on women and to see all women in destination areas as a universal category. Furthermore women can and do play an

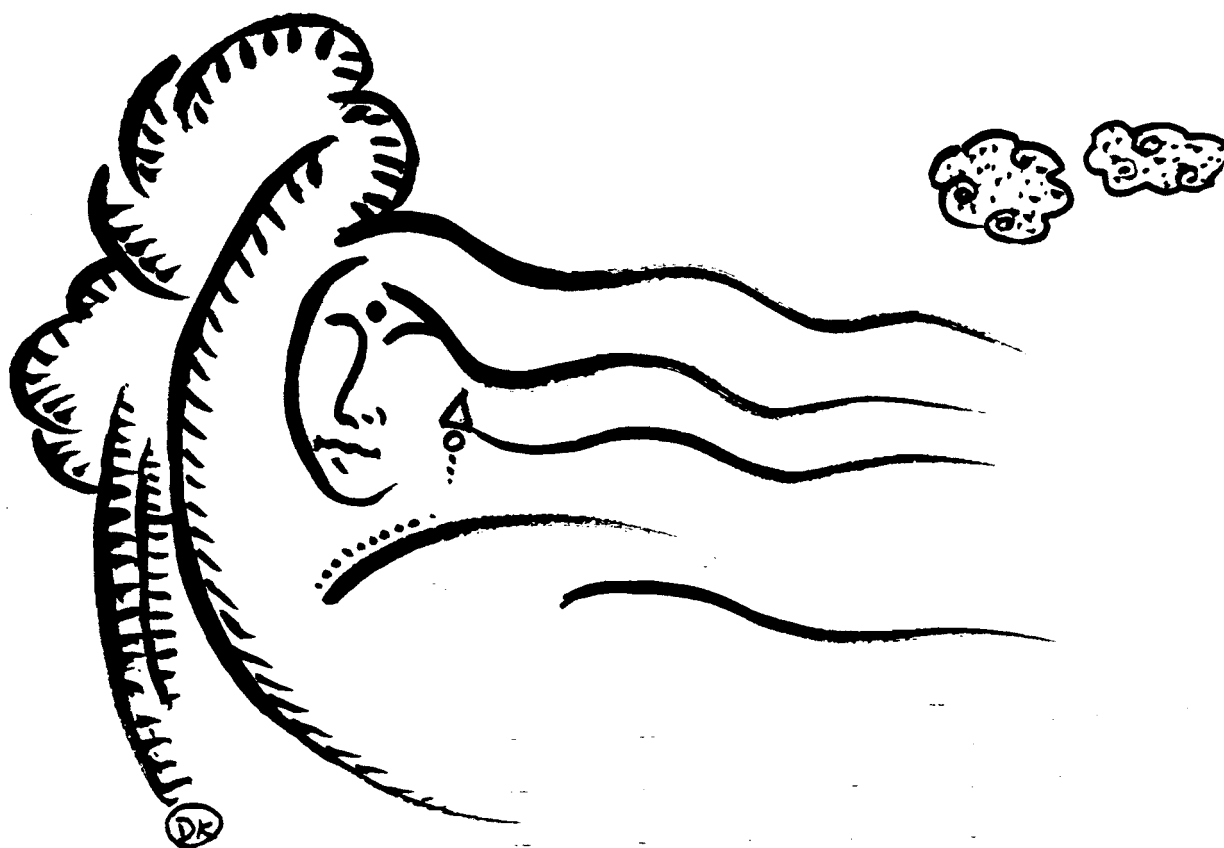
active part in the process of tourism development.

I remain convinced that there is an urgent need for research to be undertaken which will examine and analyse how women can create and sustain both their material and cultural autonomy when faced with such development. A fascinating study carried out in the late 70s by a Sri Lankan researcher, Shireen Samarasuriya, concluded that "little is known of the changes in the lives of women due to the so-called tourism development process". I am deeply concerned that twenty years later nothing has really changed. Women are certainly not 'invisible' in tourism development but they remain unacknowledged and unaccounted for in the research literature and in the subjects being covered in tourism and development courses.

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*—Tourism in Focus, Winter Issue, 1993, Number 10*

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# Working Women In Boracay

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*Sylvia Chant,*

*The disparity of employment both between men and women and between migrant and local women on Boracay, Philippines, is explored by Sylvia Chant of the London School of Economics. She illuminates how women are exploited by both local male entrepreneurs, the authorities and visiting tourists. Sylvia has published widely on gender and development, with particular reference to female employment and household survival strategies.*

Though still one of the smallest and quietest tourist resorts in the Philippines, Boracay is without doubt its fastest growing destination and presently attracts nearly one twelfth of the country's foreign visitors. Heralded by the Philippine government as the 'centre-piece' of the nation's tourist development strategy, Boracay receives priority funding from the Department of Tourism and is given prominent coverage in both national and overseas marketing.

Lying just off the coast off Panay Island in the Western Visayas, Boracay was 'discovered' by a foreign film crew in the late 1960s. It was only in the 1980s that major public and foreign investment reached the island, and even then, the development fuelled by outside capital has stayed broadly consonant with the island's own distinctive brand of 'backyard tourism'.

Boracay is traditionally home to a series of small fishing and farming communities. Its main tourism attractions are its white palm-fringed beaches, crystalline waters, and wide

range of water sports. Most accommodation is in the form of rustic beach cottages and low-rise hotels. Although backpackers have long predominated among tourists to the island, the recent growth in package holidays (largely organised by agencies in major Philippine cities such as Manila and Cebu), is giving rise to increased numbers of families and older groups of visitors.

None the less, Boracay continues to differ quite substantially from the national picture insofar as it does not receive the usual quotient of lone male tourists in the 40+-age bracket. While men are three quarters of foreign tourists to the Philippines as a whole, in Boracay they are 55 per cent and two thirds of both male and female visitors to Boracay are 35 years or below. This in part arises from the lack of an established 'sex trade' infrastructure common to so many other Philippine tourism destinations such as Manila, Cebu, Puerto Galera and Pagsanjan.

Boracay is actively promoted as a family resort, with strict clamp-downs on the opening of 'girlie bars' and staunch resistance on the part of the island authorities to make compulsory the issue of health certificates to bar and restaurant workers, mainly for fear of acknowledging and legitimating the operation of sex-oriented enterprises. Boracay is

presented by government officials as a clean and wholesome alternative. Only locals and visitors know that the underlying reality is somewhat less glossy than the promotional rhetoric would lead one to believe.

Notwithstanding the presence of a discreet, low-level (and growing) sex trade on the island, the vast bulk of Boracay's populace are engaged in a wide range of more conventional commercial and service activities normally associated with sun and sea destinations. Indeed, the rapid growth in the tourism labour market from the mid-1980s onwards has attracted migrants from surrounding farming and fishing communities, as well as from towns and cities further afield, including Manila. This has contributed to swelling the population to around 8,000 - about one third of whom were born outside the island.

In keeping with national patterns, women have figured prominently among migrants and interesting lines of segmentation in the labour market have emerged not only between women and men, but also between migrant and native women.

In terms of the general configuration of the labour market, two distinct types of employment are apparent: that of a 'formal' nature whereby people work for employers in restaurants, hotels and shops, and that of a more 'informal' nature where people are wholly or partially self-employed. The latter includes such activities as beachfront vending, boat operating or taxi-driving (taxis on Boracay consist of pedicabs or motorised bikes and tricycles).

In formal employment, women predominate as sales assistants,

chambermaids, laundry women and in certain kinds of restaurants (particularly beach bars and eateries) as waitresses. While men are also found in room cleaning, laundry work and waiting, occupations tending to be exclusively male include cooking, gardening, maintenance, security, portage, and guest transportation.

Rationalisations by employers for the recruitment of men and women into different activities include those based on 'natural' factors such as strength, as well as the different skills assumed to be acquired by men and women in the course of their different types of upbringing. With the notable exception of cooking, which is very much a male preserve in Philippine restaurants and hotels, women are thought to have an aptitude for most other domestic-related activities such as cleaning, since they are more likely to have helped their mothers in the home. Men on the other hand, are thought to have an affinity for more technical jobs associated with maintenance.

Beyond this, however, and for occupations requiring direct contact with the public, a number of more tenuous explanations are also used to justify the selective recruitment of the different sexes. Female sales assistants are seen as being more adept at arranging merchandise, more patient, and more importantly, likelier to attract custom. Many shops are open-fronted and assistants are often expected to stand outside and encourage passers-by to walk in. In addition, female sales assistants are imagined to have 'more of a way' with clientele and thus greater powers of persuasion necessary for a competitive retail market.

The same kind of principles apply to female recruitment in beachfront restaurants. Indeed one criterion for applicants obtaining hostessing or waitressing work is to have a 'pleasing personality'. This widely used



Filipino term means, amongst other things, youth, good looks, grooming, charm and a 'well-modulated' voice. Moreover, female restaurant workers often have to dress-up in 'native' costumes with flowers in their hair to give them further appeal. Thus although these jobs are not apparently associated with the direct use of Filipino women as sexual commodities, there are obvious sexual overtones embodied in recruitment and employment practices.

The general male-female divisions in formal employment tend to be mirrored in the 'informal' sector. Men dominate in passenger and freight boat transport, in taxi-driving and in fishing, whereas women are predominantly ambulant vendors or sellers of services such as domestic labour and child-minding. Although men are around 15 per cent of all ambulant vendors, they are involved in a rather narrow range of products. While women are engaged in the sale of massages, manicures, fresh fruit, coconut oil, home-cooked snacks, shorts and T-shirts, shellcraft and wickerware, men are generally confined to the sale of three items: ice-cream, fish and newspapers. All these tend to have a guaranteed market and do not require the 'hard sell' necessitated by those peddling 'nonessential' services or products such as massages and handicrafts. Guaranteed markets also mean that male vendors normally have higher and more stable earnings than women.

There are also differences between migrant and native women's employment. On the whole, migrant women are involved in formal employment, whereas native women predominate in informal commercial

activity. Many of those in formal employment, particularly in restaurants and hotels, are migrant, young and single and live-in where they work, sharing a room with up to ten female colleagues. The relevance of the live-in system and its interaction with migrant status can be seen from a number of perspectives.

As far as employers are concerned, migrant live-ins are more flexible as they work longer hours than those who have local homes to go to, and are also less prone to absenteeism. In addition, deductions for bed and board can amount to half the salary to which they are legally entitled and unscrupulous employers use it to pay their workers far less than the minimum wage. Other advantages include the fact that provision of a home to a vulnerable migrant tends to foster loyalty, and more importantly, fear. Migrant workers lacking family in the vicinity are often scared to put a foot wrong in case they are thrown out on the street.

Setting-up home under the paternalistic wing of an employer can also provide a certain amount of psychological and emotional security for teenagers and young adults from remote rural villages. Moreover, without the responsibility of running their own homes and feeding themselves, migrants can use most, if not all, their cash earnings to help family members back home (which is often the major factor motivating their decision to move in the first place). Especially common is the practice whereby a migrant worker of either sex takes responsibility for the schooling costs of younger siblings. As for the women born in Boracay itself, especially those over thirty, the tendency is to work in the informal sector, especially in independent commercial activities such as ambulant vending or home-based retail and production. Domestic-based enterprises include sari-sari stores (front-room shops selling everything from beer to matches to cleaning fluids);

carinderias (home based cateries often under a nipa palm canopy, which sell a range of cooked snacks such as sticky rice and barbecued banana), and shellcraft workshops where women (and often their children) make jewellery, lampshades and door hangings for sale to tourist shops.

The prevalence of mature women in this domain is largely explained by the dearth of formal sector openings for them. They also usually have children to take care of which makes the long shifts common in formal employment extremely difficult.

Some of the more positive reasons for the movement of older women into independent commerce is that they may have more in the way of assets (savings, property and so on) necessary to set up their own businesses. Local women have the added advantage of being in place when tourism started to evolve and have in several senses colonised the market. Migrants to Boracay are conceivably put off by existing competition, and lacking capital and assets, often find it easier to work for an employer instead.

Despite the immense range of formal and informal jobs performed by women, the highest earners in Boracay still tend to be men. One reason is that women are often more flexible in their profit margins. Ambulant masseuses, for example, charge a regular rate of 50 pesos (\$1.30) for a half hour massage, but depending on their custom that day and the type of massage the client wants, will lower their prices to have the work. Men who operate motorbike taxis on the other hand, not only rarely deviate from their standard rate (15 pesos minimum for a short ride of up to 5 minutes), but will often overcharge

and refuse to take passengers who balk at paying inflated prices.

In short, men appear to have the luxury to turn down business in a way that women cannot, and to be less prepared to take a cut in profits. Part of this may be due to the fact that women are the economic mainstay of many households on the island and therefore have to generate income. Indeed local culture seems highly tolerant of men not only being unemployed, but taking their wives' earnings for drinking and gambling. Women are thus caught in a double bind of earning less and paying more for making a living.

In light of the above, it is not perhaps surprising that some younger women, migrant and native alike, do end up breaking into sex work on a casual, if not full-time basis. While there is no formal sex industry on Boracay, the idea that Filipina women are available and companionable is pervasive, and lone male tourists will often pick someone up to 'take care of them during their stay'.

Some women seem to enter such arrangements with a view either to marriage or to a relationship which will help them leave the country to work abroad (again indicative of their low earning potential in the Philippines). Nonetheless, more crucial to the emergence of Boracay's sex industry is the increased influx of older male tourists who view the island as just another place where they can buy women, a process undoubtedly exacerbated by local employers who recruit women into jobs with a strong customer relations component on the grounds of their charm and beauty.

The resolute commitment on the part of the authorities to maintain Boracay as a 'clean' alternative to the sex spots of the capital and elsewhere is to be welcomed, but it should also be borne in mind that failure to



acknowledge, let alone intervene, in the developing local sex industry carries major risks. While sex workers in most Philippine cities and resorts are subject to weekly health checks, are given HIV and AIDS awareness training, and granted free supplies of condoms for self-protection, women in Boracay have no such resource. Key questions to be asked are whether explicit recognition of the problem is a necessary evil for the longer term health and welfare of the island's population; whether measures might be taken to enhance women's general access to work and earnings (and protect them from the abuses attached to male insolvency at the household level) and whether international pressure might be brought to bear on those men from the advanced

economies who see the Philippines and other Third World settings as havens of cheap sexual gratification.

(This article arises out of a larger project directed by the author and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council entitled *Gender, Development and Poverty in the Philippine Visayas*. Preliminary fieldwork was funded by small grants from the ESRC, Nuffield Foundation, British Academy and the Suntory-Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines. The author gratefully acknowledges these organisations for their parts in financing the projects.)

--*Tourism in Focus*, Winter Issue, 1993,  
Number 10



## Hors d'Oeuvres

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Lisa Adkins

*What's in a smile? Dr. Lisa Adkins, from the Department of Economics and Social Science at the University of West England, reveals the full extent of women's sexual objectification in tourism. This is based on her research in a seemingly innocuous leisure park for families and a hotel which is part of an international chain.*

Most if not all work on employment, including that produced by feminists, has until recently either completely ignored sexuality or denied that sexual relations operate in the labour market at all. This has been despite radical feminist's concern with sexual harassment and all the feminist research showing how important male defined sexual relations are for creating gender inequalities elsewhere, in society.

In some research I undertook on the employment of men and women in tourism I looked at the work of men and women in a hotel and a leisure park in Lancashire. In both work places jobs are highly gender segregated although there are equal numbers of male and female staff. I looked at the gender dynamics of recruitment; the forms of control to which workers were subject and the different kinds of work which men and women did.

I found that the kinds of work men did was occupationally specific, whereas part of the work women did was not. For women, it was a condition of their employment that they engage in and respond to male initiated sexual interactions with both customers and employees - in 'sexual servicing'.

In order to be employed at all at either workplace, regardless of the jobs they applied for, women had to be physically

attractive. No parallel requirement operated in relation to men. Men simply had to have skills and abilities which varied with specific occupations, but being attractive was required of women as a group, regardless of the occupation.

For instance, by far the majority of bar staff were men and by far the majority of waiting staff were women. These two occupations were very similar being high customer contact jobs, involving taking orders from customers and serving them with drinks and/or food. Given this, one might assume the personnel specifications for the two occupations would require similar worker qualities, and indeed, both jobs did require employees to be 'helpful and enthusiastic'. But bar staff, unlike waiting staff, were also required to be 'strong', 'smart' and to have 'good communication skills'. Waiting staff, on the other hand, were required to be 'attractive' and 'caring' (requirements for all the other 'women's' occupations too).

These differences cannot be adequately explained by the requirements of the jobs themselves. Why, for example, was strength needed by bar staff and not waiting staff, when delivering food to tables all day requires just as much physical stamina/strength and is just as physically demanding as lifting crates and changing barrels in bar work? Why were waiting staff required to have a 'caring' attitude when bar staff needed to be good communicators with customers? Why were bar staff required to be



(only) smart, when waiting staff were required to be attractive as well.

Similarly, at the leisure park women had to look attractive to get hired. The work was seasonal and each summer women were recruited in all occupations not simply on the basis of their having particular skills (that is, not just because they knew how to pull a pint, add up a bill or make sandwiches), but rather because they looked 'right'. As one manager said, women had to look "attractive and fresh" to get employed.

I knew a number of women who were not offered employment there because their appearance was not up to standard. For example, one because she looked 'weird' (she wore a scarf tied around her head) and a number who were said to be 'too ugly' and/or 'too manly'.

Women at the leisure park not only had to fulfil appearance criteria to get the job, they had to maintain their looks to stay there. They were instantly warned if their appearance deviated from the prescribed standard. If they failed to correct such 'appearance problems', they were dismissed.

During the time I was there women were warned about looking tired, having chipped nail varnish, wearing 'weird' make up, and looking 'sloppy'. In all these cases management told me they had "no option" but to try to get the women to correct their appearance problems". But no such controls operated on men's appearance. Both men and women had to wear clean uniforms, but this was all men had to do. Men could look tired, sloppy or

weird without their jobs being under threat.

Women at the hotel were also obliged to conform to a plethora of standards relating to personal appearance. Unlike male employees, they were given strict guidelines on the way they should wear their hair (to ensure facial display), and how to wear make-up and their uniforms. Failure to adhere to these standards again led to warnings and the possibility of dismissal.

It seems clear that part of the job for women consisted of looking good, since women not only had to look good to be employed but also had to stay looking good to remain there.

### **Sexualising uniforms**

One particular aspect of the control on women's appearance at both the hotel and the leisure park was the way in which women were required to wear their uniforms. At the hotel, they had to wear skirts, of a particular length, sheer stockings, and polished high-heeled shoes. In the bar at the leisure park, women had to wear full-skirted gingham dresses, pulled down 'off the shoulder'.

These controls turned the women into sexualised actors- 'objects' for men's use. Women in the bar risked dismissal if they refused to wear their uniform 'off the shoulder'. But both they and everyone else knew it sexually degraded them. The women concerned said that the uniform worn in this way was a way of the manager trying "to turn us into sex toys or something." Their costumes meant that they were often subject to sexual attention from male customers, co-workers and management – including the bar manager himself. It was he who decided this was the 'correct' way to wear the dress, and he aggressively enforced the requirement, often pulling the women's dresses down into the 'correct' position, thereby 'legitimately'



paying them sexual attention (touching their clothing and their bare shoulders), and simultaneously degrading them as workers.

This connection between clothing requirements and the sexualisation and degradation of women workers was also evident in the innuendoes and directly sexual and degrading comments with which women at both workplaces had to deal routinely. The degree of sexual attention paid to the women's appearance was so marked and so routine that one woman employee compared working there to "being in a tits and bums show". Another said that the male customers "seem to think we are on display for them". It can therefore be argued that sexual looks were part of what women sold to employers in exchange for employment and part of the service employers sold to customers.

### **Male customers**

Women working in such workplaces had to develop strategies to cope with the various and frequent forms of sexual attention they received from men. They did this either by 'laughing it off or by playing along with it'. They said the worst thing they could do if a man made comments to them or touched them was to get annoyed, look angry or not respond. This would make the man more likely to carry on bothering them, often more intensely. Such compulsory interactions were so regular for the women that they regarded it as a part of their job.

This is why I say part of these women's work was therefore sexual work. When male customers paid women sexual

attention, the women had to respond to some extent. They therefore sexually serviced men whether they wanted to or not.

Contrary to other researcher's suggestions about sex at work being a source of power and pleasure for women which women can get on their own terms, in the time I spent in the hotel and leisure park it was always and only male customers who initiated and defined the nature of such interactions, and it was men who were made to feel good about themselves, never the women. It was men who got their egos boosted and their sexual thrills. The way women workers were made into sex objects therefore produced a sexual power relationship (as well as the more usually recognised customer-servicer relationship) between men customers and women workers in which men dominated women.

### **Male co-workers**

This relationship between men and women was not limited simply to male customers. It also operated between women workers and male employees. Because women's employment status was defined primarily through their position as sexualised workers, women were no better placed to resist sexual interactions with male workers than they were with male customers. There was again nothing women could do except, cope with such behaviour. One woman manager was dismayed that she could not prevent male employees sexualising and harassing the women who worked in her department, not least because they did it to her as well.

The sexual power relationship between men and women workers systematically undermined the status and the overall structural position of women as workers vis-a-vis male workers in the workplaces. Men did not have their status as workers



undermined by their status as sexual subordinates. Women did. Men were able to claim (and be seen) to possess various labour market resources such as strength and specific occupational 'skills'. But because they were sexualised, women workers could never challenge this situation. They were not able to possess particular skills because the primary labour market resource they were recognised to possess, was their value as sexual servicers - they're being attractive women. Male managers participated in the creation of regulations on appearance which reduced women's status, and men in all occupations colluded in producing the conditions in which women could be and were routinely sexualised.

### **All part of the job**

The women interviewed enjoyed some of these sexualised interactions, but they found most of them annoying and embarrassing, even though not explicitly coercive. They were in no way 'pathetic victims', but equally they could do little to resist. What little they could do, some did, such as being sarcastic and flippant.

The fact that women's work in the labour market can be sexual (without being prostitution) has important implications for our understanding of the way sexuality figures in the labour market. In previous feminist analyses of the labour market theory, employment/waged work has

characteristically been defined as economic, and sexuality as a non-economic entity. But far from being separate, or differentiated from economic relations, sexuality can constitute part of gendered economic relations.

The way in which the women I talked to had to cope with sexualisation by male customers and workers on a day-to-day basis, as part of the job, was an outcome of the manner in which sexuality structured service-sector production. This gendering of production also created sexual relations at the two work places, since being a sexual worker placed women in a position where they were consistently sexually objectified and used by men. The relations of production thus contributed to the production of a form of male dominated sexuality. Moreover, women had no choice but to participate in male constructed sexuality if they wanted to retain their job.

Thus both coercive and 'non-coercive' heterosexual interactions in the work place were structured by male power and dominance, and both were exploitative for women. This obligation to do non-occupationally specific labour probably applies to the majority of women's occupations, for example in nursing, secretarial work and teaching. In the tourist industry the additional requirement is clearly sexual servicing.

*(This article is based on an extended version  
printed in  
Trouble and Strife, 24, Summer 1992.)*

*--Tourism in Focus, Winter Issue, 1993,  
Number 10*

## Tourism and Women- Tourism Impacts in Khajuraho

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Suhita Chopra

The interaction of women with tourists is minimal. Socio-structural and cultural factors prevents women from taking up employment in large hotels. Lack of education and skills needed in embroidery, handicraft, and food processing prevent them from cashing on the opportunities made available by tourism. Their culinary skills, too, are so modest that they themselves are pessimistic about marketing their products. Poverty has habituated them to cook with meager oil and spices. Not many tourists prefer to eat such bland food. There are no family extended hotels in Khajuraho and only two modest looking wayside eating-houses are run by a husband and wife team.

The exclusion of women from tourism related occupations implies least exposure to tourists and hence, minimal exploitation - a feature not commonly noted in other tourist resorts. Another effect of such minimal exposure is that women's role is not drastically affected and the normal rhythm of family life concerning women and her activities is least disrupted by tourism.

A woman's role is still strictly defined, circumscribed and structured by the agricultural economy of Khajuraho. Maintaining strict codes of conduct before male members of the family, she lives a life of immurement, cooking

food on primitive mud ovens by burning large chunks of firewood; washing, drying, and storing grain (food grains) in large mud containers designed by herself, grinding, and husking rice and pulses; preparing *kaiida* (cowdung cakes); looking after the cattle, and the frequent repair and maintenance of *Kutch* houses.

Each home has a spade which is frequently used by women and children to dig earth and use the same for repair of their houses and allied purposes. I seldom came across a woman with clean hands. She is always smeared with mud, *chuimitti*, (a variety of soil) or cowdung. So common are women's masonry duties, that I felt that living in concrete structures would bring major changes in their lifestyles. This proved to be wrong because women, whose husbands were allotted staff quarters by the government, were equally busy making *attaris* (play houses) for children and additional kitchen for themselves, since the staff-quarters did not make adequate provision for outlet of smoke emanating from firewood, and were designed essentially for modern cooking techniques. The entrance to their concrete houses were also painted with *chuimitti* and cowdung, and small enclosures were made of mud and broken bricks. The spade was still an important feature in their daily lives.

Above all these duties are, of course, a woman's role as a mother. The cycle of pregnancies and suckling babies leaves very little time for other activities. I never chanced to come across a woman engaged in



handicraft, needle work, or any other activity requiring finer coordination of her finger muscles; never did I chance to come across any conscious effort to prepare edibles for the hotels. A few enterprising women disclosed to me their interests in stitching dresses, but lack of know-how and disapproval from their husbands have led to non-materialisation of their plans. It is difficult for women to shake the bondage of tradition without any conscious effort of the government to obviate their misery. SADA, with its priorities restricted to the tourism sector, can hardly be expected to undertake this responsibility. As the block level too, there are no Extension Officers in charge of women's welfare and their upliftment.

At the *Basti*, four *Kirana* shops (grocery) and one emporium are managed by women. Except for these cases, women have no exposure to the outside world. They are both the victims, as well as, bearers of tradition. It is through them that obscurantism is maintained, concepts of purity and pollution preserved, and often the right to offer prayers to Gods is solely reserved for them, for men are now less bound by tradition, and often consume liquor and meat - particularly those in the tourist trade.

The above picture fits the lives of women of high castes more than those of the lower caste categories. Low caste women often enjoy more freedom than their higher caste counter-parts. Women of Dheemar caste are now exposed to new standards of living. They serve as housemaids to many of the migrant families who have settled in Khajuraho. On account of their

exposure, they are considered by the local populace to be a highly vulnerable lot. One often hears rumours about the alleged involvement of Babu with a *Dheemaran* and the latter's involvement with tourists at different hotels. According to the local populace there has been a spurt in the number of abortions among the women of this caste. It is difficult to find out the element of truth in these allegations, since most cases are treated at the district hospital where a sufficient degree of anonymity can be maintained.

While it is difficult to assess the nature and degree of exposure of women and its effect on them; it is nevertheless sufficiently clear from these rumours, that according to the prevailing cultural norms a woman's exposure to the outside world - the world of migrants, tourists, and excursionists - is prohibited.

Despite limited exposure, changes have percolated into the strongly guarded well of a woman's life. She is now fashion conscious and despite her over-worn saree and traditional ornaments, she proudly admits changing to new styles when she visits other places as a tourist. Women, whose husbands are in the tourist trade, are well informed about cosmetics and recent advances in personal hygiene. Female tourists are often generous with gifts - perfumes, lipsticks, and even items of personal clothing and hygiene - after a successful business bargain has been struck, or after having obtained favours from the local boys. These items are then handed over to the women, at home. Seldom do the ornaments and clothing suit the reluctant wearers. I overheard the, wife of a tourist-guide narrate how her husband had presented her with ear-rings, which were most unbecoming on her, and how on finding her husband disappointed she requested him to bring a *videshi lugai* (foreign wife) to wear them!

I sometimes wondered how women could cope up with a situation where they knew that their men folk were often in the company of female tourists who were not only generous with gifts, but also liberal in their attitude towards people of the opposite sex. To my surprise women coped well, accepting the flirtatious behaviour of their menfolk as part of the business which fetches money; but at times trying to figure out the nature and extent of flirtations needed to make business a success. On such occasions their defences broke down. An interesting insight, into the effect of tourist-host

interaction and its effect on marital harmony was afforded by frequent invitation by men to take me to their in-laws. Often, I accepted these invitations, but at least on two occasions I was taken by surprise to see the wives of the men, who invited me, weep profusely in my presence. Later, it dawned upon me that I was being 'used' to threaten in-laws and wives of possibilities of remarriage with a "Madam", if things were not to the satisfaction of the husbands.

*--Tourism and Development in India,  
Pg, 197-200 Ashish Publishing House,  
New Delhi, 1991.*

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## Local Women: The force Behind Trekking Tourism in Nepal

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*Dibya Gurung*

*Tourism Concern has often used the Annapurna Area Conservation Project as an example of good community based tourism development. In this article Dibya Gurung, Women's Development Officer at ACAP, Describes how women's involvement in tourism in the area is fundamental to its success.*

The Annapurna Himal area in Nepal is renowned for two things. One, the superstars of the second world war, the Gurkha soldiers, who rank at the top of the list of the world's all-time fierce fighting men. The other, trekking tourism, which is known as the third religion of Nepal after Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Annapurna area has a great deal to offer tourists seeking the unusual. Here tourists can actually walk through the world's deepest valley, Kali Gandaki, and the world's largest rhododendron forests. It is one of the easily accessible areas from which to view the picturesque snow-clad mountain ranges of Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Machapuchhare, and attracts around forty thousand tourists every year. Along with the monetary benefits, trekking tourism has negative impacts too. The once abundant forests were cut down to cook food, boil water for bathing and provide heating for the much-appreciated trekkers. Traditional houses were modified and local handicrafts were modernised to meet the tourists' demands. The local people – once rigid and conservative were

willing to change for the tourist's benefit.

Starting a lodge business in the early days in this area was as easy as tying a shoelace. It meant merely letting out your rooms and beds for the trekkers to sleep and cooking some extra food. Family members, especially women, formed the cooking, cleaning and management staff for the lodges. Slowly with more and more trekkers visiting, numbers of family-run lodges mushroomed.

Shalli Gurung from the Milan Lodge of Ghandruk village relates her experience of earlier days when there were only two or three lodges in her village: "in those days the Goras (white people) often arrived late in the afternoon to my house after walking all day. They asked for food and a place to sleep. Of course hot showers were more important than anything else – a compulsory demand. I had a huge iron drum in which I used to heat water outside my kitchen as it needed lot of fire wood. They were satisfied with just dal-batt (rice and lentil). They never complained and were happy with whatever we offered them. But today with more than seventeen lodges in my village, the Goras have become very smart. They check the rooms, beds and the hot shower facilities. Our menus have more than 15 items of Western foods. Some even want to make sure that firewood is not used for cooking and hot showers. Times have changed."

Here in the Annapurna area women form the majority of the total population and are fully involved in the management of domestic work as well as playing an active role in the use and conservation of natural resources. This traditional and compulsory role has helped women to move into the world's most popular industry, tourism.

The majority of the men leave the village to join the British or Indian army. Others migrate to the cities in search of wage labour to supplement their household income. The only permanent residents of the area are women, children and retired ex-army men. The retired men are the primary decision-makers with respect to village development and conservation issues. Lodge management is also one of the components of these issues. They hold monthly meetings, yet have very little involvement in the actual implementation and running of the lodges. The multiple role of women makes them the main force behind trekking tourism in the Annapurna region.

The popularity of trekking is growing very quickly and so trekking has considerable negative impacts in an ecologically fragile area like the Annapurna. The area has been subjected to close scrutiny especially by conservation groups. Thus in 1986, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) – under the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, a leading environmental organisation – was established in Ghandruk village in Annapurna. The Project opted for a holistic approach working with local people. As Annapurna is one of the most popular trekking destinations in the country, tourism management

together with natural resource management was given the top priority. A sound and sustainable programme has been developed for safeguarding the unique natural features and rich culture, while at the same time maximising the benefits of tourism in the area.

Like in many conservation projects with general impacts, women were initially not a direct focus of ACAP's original design. As usual, women's major roles in the conservation and management of both the natural resources and the household work was overlooked. As activities got underway, however, the Project staff quickly realised that the direct involvement of women was crucial to the success of the Project. Thus in 1990, after three and a half years, ACAP introduced a separate Women's Development (WD) section as one of their main programmes. Since then, the WD section has been actively involved in integrating the local women in all development and conservation activities.

Traditionally, there were women's groups in this area, known as *Ama Toli* meaning 'Mother's Group'. Every village had one and it raised funds for the village's welfare by dancing for guests on special occasions in the village and for special requests by trekkers. They had already developed a system for cleaning the village, upgrading trails, building temples and buying utensils with funds raised. In some cases the funds were used to provide loans to the villagers in need. The women pride themselves on their clean villages with well maintained trails. Thus it was easy for the ACAP's WD section to work with the already existing women's groups. The Ama Toli too accepted WD's assistance, hoping to become more organised and efficient in their programme implementation.

Gurung's – the majority population of the southern Annapurna area – are not great



entrepreneurs. Trekking tourism was a totally foreign occupation for the traditional sheep herders, who later adopted subsistence farming for their living. They did not have the culture of selling their farm products. Cereals were bartered, but the surplus vegetables were distributed for free to their neighbours. Serving tea for the travellers was considered a status symbol for the local villagers. But the benefits of tourism made them adapt to the new occupation. Buddhisuba Gurung of Lwang village, which falls outside the trekking route, was very impressed by her visit to Ghandruk village in 1992. In an address to the women in Lwang she said: "Like the women from Ghandruk we too should learn to make some money. They do not feel shy to sell their surplus vegetables. If we do the same here, it will be the talk of the village."

One year after the inception of the WD section, we started with supporting the indigenous tourism related programs with the aim of creating services for the trekkers as well as some income for the local women. In January 1991, Hita Gurung inaugurated her carpet shop with a show room in the Ghandruk village, the first of its kind. She was provided with a loan from the Project. She started weaving traditional rugs of all sizes both for the villagers and the trekkers. She also asked the village women to bring their products to her showroom where she sold them. Today she has paid back the loan and made weaving her full-time occupation. Ama Carpet Shop gave rise to yet another carpet centre in the village, where five women have rented a room jointly where they weave as well as sell traditional rugs.

Along with the monetary benefits, trekking tourism has created some new needs among the women here. Adult literacy classes are considered very essential, a sudden interest in acquiring skills in food processing, poultry farming and lodge management has become the latest demand. Recently they have been showing great interest in learning English as they feel that they can independently handle the business and serve the tourists better if they speak their language.

Over the last few years the people of the Annapurna area have sought to understand the impacts of trekking tourism in the area and the local committees have been campaigning towards managing sound and sustainable tourism. Women's groups have developed a remarkable ability to work together and sharing their skills and resources, to take action – the cooperative carpet shop and regular clean-up campaigns are perfect examples.

Women in this area have come a long way. Five years ago, the use of alternative forms of energy for cooking was almost nonexistent. But today one can see back boilers, low wattage cookers, liquid paraffin gas and kerosene stoves in almost all lodges. The women have become aware about the present deforestation situation and have been adopting precautions. Women have embraced a variety of enterprises which directly or indirectly support tourism. At the household level, vegetable farming, fruit tree growing, poultry and rabbit raising have become booming enterprises and training on Developing Women's Entrepreneurship in Tourism, jointly given by the International Labour Organisation and ACAP, have helped more women to be independently involved in tourism businesses.

**--Tourism in Focus, Winter Issue, 1993,  
Number 10**



# Gender Culture and Tourism Development in Western Samoa

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**Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop**

*Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, argues that contrary to the predictions of the women and development models, Samoan women have not been marginalised in the tourism industry. In fact, Samoan women have shown considerable initiative and used the opportunities available in the tourism industry to develop their entrepreneurial skills.*

One reason for the Samoan women's experience being different to that of women in other developing nations may be that Samoans continue to live according to the faaSamoa (the Samoan way). The faaSamoa is a system of chiefly rule in which every person is expected to know their place and the correct behaviour patterns of their place. Prestige is achieved by giving and sharing rather than accumulating resources and family members 'serve' their chief by contributing their labour and resources to enable the chief to fulfil his or her duties. As the prime motivating factor is to promote the family good, little antagonism is displayed towards women pursuing their own entrepreneurial activities as this is perceived to be in the 'family interest'. Also, most Samoan women have the basic skills and positive attitudes needed to undertake development enterprises as they have equal access with males to education opportunities and are used to participation in decision making. Although 'village hospitality' is still the responsibility of women, today the tasks are done by the village Women's Committee, a corporate group made up

of village wives and daughters. In many villages the Women's Committees have widened their role to become the major implementers of successful development programmes and income generating activities.

## **Women's roles**

Women form an estimated 80 per cent of the formal tourist sector workforce. Women are not confined to the secretarial and sales fields in these enterprises, but hold management positions. A large proportion of women are also engaged in the informal tourism sector (handicraft production, tours, family guest houses, informal selling).

Women have built new and lucrative enterprises out of initial small-scale activity by skillfully identifying a market and responding to opportunities. The faaSamoa has also provided women with a loyal family support network which has enabled women to take risks as they explore new business directions. Women have utilised the family system operating norms to the advantage of the business itself and to the advantage of family members.

## **Aggie's 'Home away from Home'**

Aggie's is now indisputably the most well known hotel in the South Pacific. To tourists



it is a Pacific landmark, to economic-experts it is proof that an indigenous business enterprise can 'take-off' and to the Samoan government Aggie's is a major source of foreign exchange.

Determined her younger children would enjoy the same education as her older children had, Aggie Grey progressed from selling baskets of fruit and vegetables to New Zealand administrators' wives, to handicrafts then hospitality. Today the modest two roomed guest house Aggie began in the 1930s is an internationally recognised multimillion complex, incorporating a 154 room hotel, gift shop, tours, and an extensive farm developed specifically to meet the hotel's food needs.

Aggie's is run like a chiefly system with Aggie at the head. The relationship between the Grey family and their staff has been described as 'personal rather than directive' with the result that workers feel they have a personal stake in the business. Aggie utilised family links or forged business links based on personal loyalty. She always purchased handicrafts and other goods from certain villages and buyers, thus guaranteeing these people a market. In return, they brought their best goods to stock her shop. She created work for those urgently in need of cash and in many cases gave higher prices than a piece of handicraft warranted. Today Aggie's employs over 250 people. "We could run the hotel with fewer, but you don't fire 'family'".

#### **Moelagi Jackson and village development**

Moelagi Jackson has a chiefly title, Vaasili. She assumed complete charge of the Safua Hotel (Savaii Island) when

her husband died in 1987. The hotel consists of 9 fale (Samoan houses) and is built within her family village. It progressed from hospitality to historical tours and village tours to see women making traditional handcrafted goods. Moelagi was instrumental in starting a Women's Advisory Committee for the district and gaining local and international donor agency interest in sponsoring education workshops for the women's groups. The development of the Safua Hotel complex, and its supporting services, has featured a deliberate educational input such as tie-dye workshops and business skills courses at each step, each centred around the demands of the hotel.

#### **The Women's Committee solution**

The endurance of traditional ways presents women with a dilemma: should they produce the goods needed for daily household use, ceremonial purposes and formal exchange, or should they produce the goods tourist like to buy? The Women's Committee members found that producing handicrafts for the tourist market was both risky and uneconomical. The price tourists were willing to pay for *tapa* (hand made cloth made from beating the bark of a mulberry tree and used in ceremonial exchanges) did not even cover labour time costs, nor did tourists appreciate the cultural value.

However, by combining new technology and old, the women found a way of producing goods which were particularly Samoan and in high demand locally, regionally and internationally. Women's Committees ran tie-dyeing workshops in which they used natural materials to copy the designs of imported tie-dyed pareus (flowered cloth for sarongs), which had become popular through out Samoa. They used their *tapa* boards to print the materials, which were then made

into traditional dresses, modern styles, bags and table cloths.

By carefully identifying and separating the demands of the two markets, the women made sure that traditional goods were still available for home and ceremonial use. It is notable that the goods women customarily produce are still the validating core of exchanges - these have not been replaced by commodity goods. Hence, women's goods are still highly valued in society.

These are three examples of many which could have been employed to illustrate how Samoan women have used the opportunities presented in the tourism industry to develop their entrepreneurial skills. In a society where there are few income generating avenues, the tourism enterprise has enabled women to learn new skills and

apply old skills to new fields. Samoan women have been able to capitalise on the opportunities the industry offers because their rights have been safeguarded by customary norms and women's efforts have not been confined to improving only their own welfare but to giving other women within their family and villages the opportunity to progress and learn new skills as well.

This is an edited abstract of a chapter by Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop in *Tourism: A Gender Analysis* which is edited by Derek Hall and Vivian Kinnaird, to be published by John Wiley and Sons Ltd (Belhaven Press) in February 1994, price £35 (provisional). For details please contact the publishers at 22 East Castle Street, London W1N 7PA

*--Tourism in Focus, Winter Issue, 1993,  
Number 10*





# Temple Town Loses to Vice

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K Santosh Nair

*The temple town of Mahabalipuram, famous for its Shore Temple and sculptures dating back to the Chola period, has degenerated into a haven for prostitutes and drug traffickers, BLITZ can reveal. Mahabs, as the tourist-heavy town is known, has changed from the sleepy adjuncts to nearby Chennai that it once was, swamped as it now is by visitors who come to sample its vices rather than its ancient artifacts and extensive beaches. A highly placed source told BLITZ that 'increased police surveillance and plenty of arrests have failed to check the rampant prostitution, or stop the roaring drug trade in the seaside town.*

*The police started a clean-up campaign about a year back, raiding many of the*

*small hotels, restaurants and shacks that dot Mahabs, but the results have been patchy. Every raid turns up a rich haul, according to a senior police official, but it hasn't slowed up business.*

*What it has done is inconvenience the owners of the raided establishments, who allege that the police have targeted them in order to extract 'protection money'. One hotel owner, who spoke to BLITZ on condition of anonymity, claimed he was raided after he refused to dole out the cash demanded. Police officials maintain that the harassment stories are cooked up by crooked owners, and that they have been under intense pressure to rid Mahabs of prostitutes and drug dealers.*

*While prostitution is easier to identify, and hence police, drugs are a more troublesome matter.*

*Most of the drugs come from Chennai and among the peddlers are a number of foreigners. Drug deals are usually carried out during the off season, when fewer tourists, Indian or foreign, visit the town. This is mainly because visitors pack the town during the peak season -- when the Mahabalipuram Dance Festival and the Shore Temple Festival are held -- and police presence is at its yearly high.*

*Police officials say that they encounter a different kind of problem when they catch drug-dealing foreigners, whose cases have to be taken up with the respective consulates. "We are helpless in cases involving foreigners," a senior police officer told BLITZ. "In most of the cases they are only asked to leave the country."*

*Commercial sex in Mahabs is a different kettle of fish. Both locals as well as women from Chennai ply the trade, but what worries the police is the organised racket in procuring girls and*

forcing them into prostitution. Says a senior police official: "Pimps who operate in this area lure, and if that fails, force callow girls into the trade." A local source told BLITZ that prostitution in Mahabs is controlled by affluent business -men with political clout.

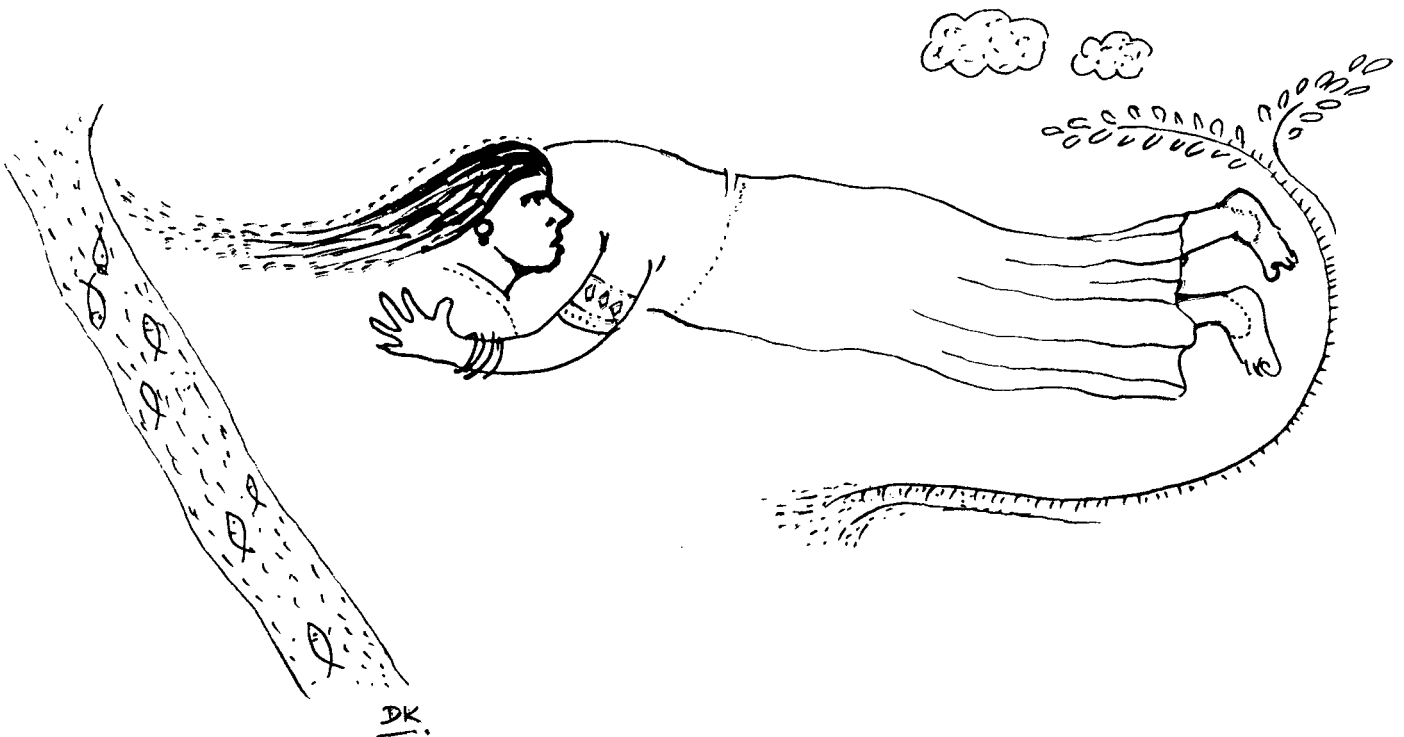
"Any amount of action has no effect," moans a police officer who recently arrested a prostitution racketeer

only to let him off after political pressure was applied. Many owners of lodges and small restaurants claim that the business flourishes under the very nose of the police. They claim that 25% of the money earned is given to the cops.

"I paid the police Rs 15,000 a month to run this business," says one peeved lodge owner who was arranged under the Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act but is presently out on bail.

"Suddenly they come and raid my lodge and take away the girls. Is it Justified?" Health officials who have visited Mahabs for fear that sexually transmitted diseases, especially AIDS, may become the order of the day if necessary steps are not immediately taken.

—BLITZ, September 20,  
1997





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## Women And Children in Kovalam

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*T. G. Jacob*

The single, most propagated reason for declaring tourism as an industry and imposing it as a development model is its employment generation aspect. In the preceding chapters we have dealt with the nature and extent of employment generated in Kovalam in its almost thirty years of tourism history. As women and children form a significant percentage of the workforce, and as their lot is a most pathetic one, their situation best reflects the poverty of the place in contrast to the opulent tourist consumption patterns and culture.

The most vivid visual in Kovalam is the scene of women and children squatting on the roads and breaking granite pieces into smaller ones for use in construction work. Stone workers, numerically speaking, are predominantly women and children. The second most important activity of the local people, coir spinning, is also woman centred. It is women who do the back breaking labour of processing the decayed husk into fibre by beating it with heavy sticks and then spinning the golden coloured yarn into coir of various thicknesses. In the coir sector women and children constitute at least ninety per cent of the total workforce, the same as in the stone sector. In the third sector, fishing, women work as retail sellers in the local as well as city markets and at home engage in the drying process.

In the tourism sector local women generally get work only as sweepers and laundresses in the small and big hotels. And for these jobs they must be young and tolerably good looking, especially if they are to get jobs in the bigger establishments. In some of these establishments they may be required to double up as emergency prostitutes. We often find women working as sweepers in government owned hotels, which are located on land that belonged to their families in the not so distant past. Some women, though few, eke out a miserable living from the tourism sector by hawking tender coconuts, fruit, trinkets, cheap cloth and so on to the tourists.

The most remarkable thing in relation to children is the very casual attitude towards education. Kovalam, in general, is a place characterised by high illiteracy and, of course, girl children often do not attend school. The large majority of them start working at a very early age (some as early as five to six years), and the rest half-heartedly attend school for a few years. Those who pass matriculation, or even reach up to it, are rare indeed. The case of boys is not much better. The whole social attitude is contra education and the schools are abysmally poor in quality. Only a few of the youth find their way into college. A couple of years back a racket selling printed school leaving certificates to youth, who had never attended any schools for more than two or three years, was busted. But it took several years to trace this racket and bust it. Therefore, whatever data there is on the number of Secondary School Leaving Certificate holders is unreliable.

### **The Granite Sector**

Granite quarrying is a very primitive economic activity. Granite is available in plenty because the bone structure of the whole area is tough rock. Stone quarries are mainly private though there are a couple of big government owned ones too. The total number of workers in this sector comes to above 25,000, and almost 80-90 per cent are women and children. The only level of mechanisation that has occurred is the introduction of jackhammers in some of the quarries and the use of trucks to transport the big pieces of rock to the roadsides.

The division of labour between men, women, and children is sharply drawn. Men are occupied in the blasting and transporting activities using power drills and trucks. Wielding small hammers women and children break the stones at piece-rates into smaller pieces for use in concreting. A number of intermediaries are involved, some of them are women.

Ten years back there was a move to organise these workers into co-operative societies and a lead society was formed with government support. They procured their own trucks to transport the granite, and some partly successful attempts were made to push up the wages to a little more decent level. But this attempt was short lived because the quarry contractors were too powerful, and the trade union and society leaderships very receptive to corruption. The union and society no longer exist and the trucks and other infrastructural facilities procured by the society have corroded beyond redemption. After the collapse of this experiment no further attempts were made to better the lot of the workers. In any case, by this time the priority had decisively shifted to generating tourist facilities, and it was very much in the interest of the tourist

sector to maintain the overall backwardness and obtain supply of this prime construction raw material at the cheapest rates. Organising these workers into a bargaining grouping obviously runs counter to the interests of the tourism sector.

The women and children, ranging from seven to seventy years in age (most of the children employed are female), do not have any enclosed place to work but are compelled to work in public on the roadsides, usually under the protection of a single coconut leaf over their heads. The work site is dictated by the convenience of the truck movements. A relatively healthy woman, working from morning to evening, breaks about six to seven baskets of rubble, which brings in a maximum of Rs. 35 as wages. Children and old people get much less. And this is in a State where the average daily agricultural worker wage ranges between Rs. 80 to 100 a day.

Tourists seem quite fascinated by this sight of women and children sitting by the roadside, in the fierce sun or torrential rain, wielding the hammer in dull monotonous movements. This seems especially so in the case of female tourists. They can often be observed practicing photographic rape to immortalise this vision for their friends back home and to congratulate themselves on how far advanced they are when compared to these stone age people. In fact, many tourists freely use this expression to describe the conditions of those living here. Some of them can get so moved by the pathetic sight of these women workers that they donate cash on the spot to any one worker who happens to catch their passing sympathy. So much for the interaction between tourists and the local labouring people.

Occupational hazards are many among these workers. Women and children engaged in this work soon develop respiratory problems like asthma and tuberculosis. They are also troubled by problems with vision and eye infections. There being no proper medical facilities in the area many of them live with fatal diseases without even being aware of what exactly is corroding them.



The economic condition of these workers (along with several others who are in no better position) is best illustrated in the retail provision shops after work is over. They cannot afford to buy and stock provisions for even a single day. Their purchase list runs something like: fifty paise worth tea, a rupee worth of cooking oil, a rupee worth of sugar and so forth. When they fall ill, which is common enough because of mal-nourishment, it is sheer starvation and indebtedness. The scope for borrowing is very narrow because their neighbours are mostly like themselves. The huts are dingy and dark with almost no ventilation. During the rainy season they are damp and wet too. Compared to the general working class living standards in Kerala these people are inexorably poor. This is a picture of one end of the social spectrum of Kovalam. The perversity is that the workers who build up the tourist infrastructure are themselves a tourist attraction.

Many tourism planners believe, if only such sights of abject deprivation were not there, more tourists would be flocking to Kerala. Such poverty is considered an affront to the higher sensibilities of the whites, and things would work out much better in the tourism sector if these people could be moved away from the place. A version of this approach was put into practice by the Marcos regime in the Philippines when huge walls were erected in Manila to hide the squalid ghettos from the eyes of foreigners travelling from the airport to the five-star hotels. Many of the tourism planners would actually prefer to displace all these people from the area itself, and thus have an exclusive tourist zone. Of course, this is only an infantile dream; but it was just such an infantile dream that one Mr. Sanjay Gandhi tried to implement at Turkman Gate in Delhi during the period of internal emergency at the cost

of hundreds of lives which went under the bulldozers.

### *Coir Sector Workers*

Coir spinning is a traditional occupation of the people of the area. Kovalam and surrounding villages are ancient palm fibre and coir production centres, which were linked to the main marketing centres and ports of Travancore by water. This traditional household based production has been in its death throes since quite some time. The area is one of heavy fishing and coir used to be in great demand internally. But now costlier synthetic rope that lasts longer is in vogue at the expense of coir and its producers. This by itself is due to the absolute lack of any mechanisation or modernisation in the entire sector. The production process remains as crude as ever; the only difference being that instead of bullock carts transporting the husks to the estuaries and back, and boats transporting the fibre and coir to market centres, mini trucks are used.

The employment pattern is similar to that in the quarry sector. The division of labour between the sexes is clearly defined. Men are the transporters and women carry production for the market. Coconut husks are collected from the coconut gardens by middlemen and then immersed in saline water for retting. When retting is complete after a certain number of days they are transported to the huts of coir workers, heaped into small mounds and sprinkled with common salt and sand. Water is continuously sprinkled over the heap. Women workers, using heavy sticks, beat the husks to extract the fibre. The husks are finely beaten to the point where the golden coloured fibre separates from the pith. This fibre is spun using what is called a ratt, a crude mechanical appliance of two rotating wooden wheels on movable stands. The loose fibre is spun into coir, first in thin threads, then into thicker ropes, according to purpose. The extraction of fibre and consequent spinning is done entirely by women



and girl children. When the next load of retted husks are delivered the fibre or coir is collected and payment is made on piece-rate basis. Coir is generally locally used. If bought in the form of fibre it is taken to centres like Alappuzha where mills producing coir-based products like coirised mattresses and carpets are located.

Coir is exported to other States as well as abroad, and centres like Alappuzha and Kollam are the main caterers to such markets. When compared to these centres, where the production process is mechanised to a considerable level and living wages prevail, Kovalam and neighbouring areas are pathetically backward. The production process stands where it was a hundred years ago and women workers are the worst victims of this chronic backwardness. Again, this backwardness prevails because tourism is the priority here. Private capital flows into tourism and the State focuses on Kovalam purely as a touristic commodity. This tells very harshly on productive sectors of the economy, and coir became one of the first casualties.

There is a marked decrease in the number of coconut trees. The de-emphasis of agriculture and crowding of the land with buildings for tourism has taken a heavy toll. This directly affects the coir sector. Open unemployment in this sector has become institutionalised. There is almost a fifty per cent reduction in the number of man-days worked. Coupled with below subsistence level returns the situation is doubly cruel.

### **Fish Workers**

In the fishing sector, the third biggest traditional economic activity of the region, women work mainly as fish hawkers going to the nearby markets with basket loads on

their heads, or they hawk the fish from door to door. On Kovalam beach they buy in bulk from the fishermen in on the spot auctions and make a margin from selling retail. This is more lucrative when compared to the quarry and coir sectors, but is strictly dependent on the availability of fish. For example, during the peak of the monsoons there is very little catch, and these women sellers simply vanish from the scene. A corollary aspect of the fishing scene is that when there is a bumper catch fish goes very cheap and these women buy up bigger quantities than usual and dry the fish in the sun for stocking and selling when there is no or very little catch.

In general, the monsoons are periods of extreme privation for the fisherfolk. The men cannot go to the sea, and very often it becomes the sole responsibility of the women to avoid total starvation, forcing them to seek work in other sectors like granite breaking. Any accumulation that was possible during the fishing season is automatically wiped out in no time with the result that no significant permanent improvement in economic status, however marginal, ever happens. And, educationally, this is the most backward section of people; so there is no point in expecting any improvement in quality of life from that quarter.

In Vizhinjam, falling within the tourism circle of Kovalam, the situation is not exactly the same. This is the heavy fishing area from where more than 3000 boats go out into the sea. Mechanisation is limited to outboard engines fitted to traditional craft, but the catch is quite large. There are big export oriented dealers here, though not as many as in Kollam or Kochi. But not all varieties of fish are exported; the exportable items are the high cost ones, and they go from here to Kochi port. Other fish, as well as a portion of the exportable fish, feeds the city as well as the interior districts. Here also a good many women are sellers and dryers, but their overall conditions of living are the same as that of the fisherwomen of Kovalam. Educationally and healthcare wise,



they are in a worse position than the women in Kovalam proper, if that is at all possible.

At least ninety per cent of the total number of women of the area belong to the three categories enumerated above. Though they belong to occupationally different communities they merge into one another according to the pressure of circumstances. Even then, as sociological entities, they remain quite separate.

To generalise, the most outstanding and visible feature marking the conditions of women and children of Kovalam and its immediate environs is the stark level of poverty manifested in material conditions, educational levels and health standards. The standard of living is not typical of Kerala on a macro-level. In fact, the whole place ought to be declared as an especially backward area, and worthwhile projects chalked out and implemented. To state that tourism is going to ameliorate their position even a few degrees is an outright lie because the present position is one after thirty years of unbridled and fantastic growth of tourism in the area. Their situation has only become worse with each passing year. Tourism is propagated as development oriented; however, in the case of the people of Kovalam, as can be seen from the conditions strangulating the women and children, it is the reverse.

There is a minority, about five per cent of the population, that is urbanised, educated

and economically better off. This section can be called the middle class in terms of economic status, and a good section from among them are in one or the other way dependent on tourism. To this section belong the restaurant and other shop owners, taxi and autorickshaw owners, petty officials and so on. There are a few big sharks, but they are only a micro percentage. The situation of women in these families is not characteristic of the place, and their children go to the more expensive schools, though most of the adults are educationally poor. It is a striking feature of Kovalam that, although the lowest and middle classes are often close relatives, there is utmost contempt for the working masses. Community-wise almost ninety-nine per cent of the people belong to what are classified as backward communities and scheduled castes; however, economic differences have to a large extent broken the teeth of any real solidarity. The new class structure that has evolved as a result of the growth of tourism is a highly distorted one. The class structure has developed in such a way as to marginalise the overwhelming majority of the people. In other words, the superimposed and inorganic nature of this development is shocking, and the status of the majority of the women and children of the area is the most acute expression of this absurdity.

**- Tales of Tourism from Kovalam, Pg. 92-99, Odyssey, Thiruvananthapuram 1998**

## Legitimising Prostitution

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**Meena Menon**

It is not often that a sports stadium is host to a conference of women in prostitution. But for the second time in two years, Salt Lake stadium in Calcutta was the venue of the second phase of the conference of sex workers in March. In a large conference hall, prostitutes from various parts of the country gathered to discuss problems that affected them.

Essentially a follow-up to the first conference, which drew, outraged protests from various quarters, including women's organisations, this meeting sought to clarify and discuss their demands and devise a plan of action. Among the resolutions endorsed at the conclusion of the conference was that sex work should be treated like any other occupation, decriminalization of sex work, setting up self regulatory boards and recognition of human rights and civil liberties of women in prostitution.

It was also resolved to ensure that the rights of

their children are protected, that these women get equal opportunities and representation in decision-making. It was decided to constitute a national network of sex workers with representations from all over the country. The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), a collective of women in prostitution, formed in 1995, is spearheading the campaign for sex worker's rights, legalisation of prostitution, setting up of self regulatory boards controlled by women in prostitution, and scrapping of the Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act.

Ms. Sadhana Mukherjee, secretary of the Committee, said, "Women are in the control of the landlords, they have no rent bills, no ration cards, and the police is very hostile to us. We cannot vote in our names. We get bullied for money from the local goondas, pimps and we are threatened, beaten and knifed," she said. "If we have a self regulatory board, we can find out who the women entering the profession are. So far the act only harasses us and stops us from soliciting on

the street. Who will look at us if we are at home? Legalisation will give us dignity and our voice will be heard," said Ms Mukherjee. The Committee has a membership of 30,000 women and 32 branches in West Bengal.

Ms. Mukherjee feels legalisation will decrease the entry of minor girls into prostitution. Unless the prostitutes have a self-regulatory board which authorises them to issue licences, the influx of minors cannot be controlled. In the last six months, women in two red light areas of Calcutta have been able to stop the entry of minors, she added. The board will comprise women in prostitution, NGOs and other individuals.

Ms. Mala Singh convenor of Committee, said, "We want to be recognised as women and have the same rights as any other citizen. We want trade union status, have holidays and the right to refuse clients."

Dr Samarjit Jana, director of the STD/ HIV Intervention Programme, Calcutta, said existing laws and the social systems only enhanced the exploitation of women. "Prostitution is considered inhuman and not accepted as work. People feel legalisation of prostitution as a profession would endanger the core of the



society and encourage more sex outside the family and more women into the trade."

Besides, the culture of "gharwali" or "madam" controlled brothels was on the decline in Calcutta which made it simpler for the women to organise and make their own demands. A sex worker, he said, should get the rights of any seller of goods and the rights any worker is entitled to. It was ironic that women are not allowed to sell sex but are sold into the trade and the state wants to perpetuate this process, he added.

Meena Seshu of SANGRAM, a Sangli based organisation, favours decriminalization of prostitution, that is scrapping the laws controlling prostitution and trafficking, rather than legalisation. Today the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act comes under the Cr PC, and the implementation of this law is in the control of the police. The police and the law enforcement machinery are the main problems for sex workers, she said. By releasing laws from the criminal code, the

women could get some amount of relief from Police harassment.

However, there can be a law for trafficking, but prostitution should be removed from the purview of trafficking, she felt. If prostitution was legalised, then there could be attendant problems of licensing, zoning and even taxes which could create more problems and be oppressive to women, Ms Seshu explained. Sex workers needed a safe working environment and this assumed importance in the context of HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. Women who are constantly being criminalised cannot be empowered and cannot negotiate with their partners for the use of condoms, she said.

Women in prostitution are now demanding recognition more than anything else. The Centre for Feminist Legal Research (CFLR), New Delhi, has been asked to conduct an investigation and research into the feasibility of the self-regulatory boards, and what it implies from the women's point of view, she added.

The debate on whether legalisation of prostitution is necessary or not is an old one. The NGOs working with women in prostitution

and the sex workers themselves are divided on this issue. Another crucial issue is whether sex work should be treated as work and governed by labour laws.

According to some activists, there is no need to make prostitution legal as once the laws controlling it are scrapped, prostitution automatically becomes a legal activity. But some of the women are demanding licensing which means the government or an authority constituted for the purpose, will license prostitutes. Is this desirable? Jackie Pollock from the Thai group "Empower", feels legalisation could give the state too much control and fears it could be repressive. In countries where it is legalised, women's interests are not protected. It is better to decriminalise prostitution as a first step and fight for basic rights, she felt.

Indrani Sinha, of Sanlaap, an NGO which works with women and children in the red light areas of Calcutta, said that she was not against prostitution *per se* or women organising themselves to fight for their rights. But on the question of legalisation, she was firm that it could lead to an increase in trafficking and empower the pimps and other vested interest groups. While she supported the idea of self regulatory boards, she said, "I cannot support the

legalisation of anything that is rooted in oppression and violence. Sex work cannot be termed as work. In other countries where there is less stigma attached to prostitution, women can float in and out of the trade but in India once you are in the profession it is a lasting taint. I can't understand how licensing can help women in prostitution."

She feels the demand for legalisation was unrealistic and first the women must secure basic rights and better working conditions. The prostitute's collectives have been saying that they could control the entry of minors into the profession. Ms Sinha questioned this and said already, there were fake affidavits produced on behalf of the girls stating their ages which indicated they were not minors and also that they were entering prostitution willingly. How can the self-regulatory board or the government counter this, she asked.

Prostitutes collectives which have been formed in some parts of the country in the last few years, have been

working for recognition of sex work as work and decriminalization of prostitution. Women have been articulating their demands for stopping police harassment, better working conditions and control over their bodies.

While the concept of such collectives is in its infancy in India, women who are its members are learning how to negotiate with society and earn a dignified place for themselves. Shabana from Nippani is part of VAMP or Veshya AIDS Muqabla Parishad which is a collective of women in prostitution. She said, "Now we women work on our own, we solve our problems instead of running to someone. Our collective gives us an identity and we are gaining in confidence."

In the metros, the red-light areas are demarcated and NGOs can focus on one specific area but in places like Tirupati the women are scattered and solicit on street corners. R. Meera, a social worker from Women's Initiatives (WINS), started an outreach programme for HIV prevention among women in prostitution three years ago. The women in prostitution gradually came together and became confident of conducting outreach programmes.

At first they could not believe they could come together and form a collective which was done in 1996. The Chittoor Mahila AIDS Control Sangham (CMACS) was registered as a collective of sex workers with the aim of promoting health and welfare of women. This organisation has given tremendous confidence and strength to the women. In some cases, the need for collectives has stemmed from dissatisfaction with the NGOs working with women in prostitution. It was felt that the NGOs were representing their own interests and not those of the women they were working for. She was deserted by her husband when she was 16 and later sold into a Bombay brothel.

"We do not need NGOs to speak on our behalf, they are big problems. We are doing real social work, interacting with the community, spreading awareness about AIDS, distributing condoms, conducting health programmes and releasing women from custody. I believe sex work is legitimate work. If we can sell flowers or vegetables we can sell sex. If prostitution is made legal then we will not be harassed by the police and the pimps - and we don't need NGOs or middlemen." On an international level as well, groups have been campaigning for decriminalising prostitution. Lin Chew of GAATW (Global Alliance Against Trafficking of Women), Bangkok, said- the



first demand of the organisation was to decriminalise prostitution. If it was legalised, then there is the question of state interference. "I feel it should be outside the realm of state interference. Once access to basic rights is given to the women, there will be less and less state interference," she added. "The most important thing was for the women to decide what is best for them. There cannot be one model for all areas. The issue of whether sex work could be termed as work was still to be clarified. Since it was a private negotiation, it was difficult to legislate and there cannot be one uniform set of rules," she explained.

At the conference, groups of women in prostitution debated the question of self-regulatory boards, legalisation, decriminalization and the question of sex work as work. Police participation in self-regulatory boards was hotly debated with many women feeling that the police were corrupt and equally responsible for exploiting and abusing women. Usha Chavan from

Baina in Goa said there was strong opposition to the small red light area in the port town of Vasco and there was a virtual curfew declared in the area and the police discouraged men from going there. "There are moves to evict us from the area and rehabilitate us but we have little idea what will be done with us eventually," she added.

Shyamla Nataraj, programme director of the South India AIDS Action Programme, disagrees with the demand for scrapping the laws relating to prostitution. She said the Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act was essentially meant for the women. "The act can be used for their benefit as well and we have proved this in certain cases in Tamil Nadu, so the scrapping of the act is not really what we should be demanding. According to a study on prostitution in Tamil Nadu, 70 per cent of the girls had some school background. They were not forced into prostitution or trafficked, many chose to leave their homes at the first opportunity. But they have no idea what they have to put up with."

"In the first two or three years of her new life, she is invisible, the network keeps

her safe and there is very little outside contact. This is the period when she wants to leave but no one can help her. She is not the woman we distribute condoms to. By the time she is in the profession for a few years, she is conditioned and does not want to get out. Child prostitution is too well camouflaged and well entrenched with the mafia," she said. Ms Nataraj feels such conferences cannot be the decisive fora but a beginning for a discussion on these issues. Certainly one can make demands but it cannot be endorsed as a representative mandate of all the women in prostitution, she added.

There is a clear polarisation over the demand to treat sex work as work, legalisation of prostitution, scrapping of the laws governing prostitution but there seems to be support for self-regulatory boards which are controlled by the women themselves. However, there are no two opinions on the need for women in prostitution to collectivise and articulate their demands and fight for them. What the women are demanding are so basic - better working conditions, humane treatment, equal opportunities for their children, care when they are old and infirm- things that are taken for granted under our democratic constitution.

What the women are also demanding is acceptance as citizens with no stigma attached to them. Prostitutes are still perceived as "bad women" or gangsters molls and few perceive them as ordinary women with ordinary aspirations

Common perceptions about women in prostitution need to be altered first if the women are to live a dignified existence. The question is not whether to legalise or decriminalise prostitution but whether the women will be allowed to live a secure life without harassment of any sort and not be treated as criminals. That is the bottom line. If the trade is legalised, the women could be subjected to all sorts of external or state control. Already in Maharashtra there were moves to introduce a law to subject women in prostitution to compuls-

ory medical cheek-ups and to brand those women suffering from sexually transmitted diseases with indelible ink. Licensing could give the government more powers which could dictate such retrograde actions. On the other hand, the demand for self-regulatory boards is a viable one since the boards would be in control as in any other professional regulatory body. The question of whether sex work is work is a complex one. Women in prostitution argue that if factory work, construction labour and other forms of employment which are equally exploitative can be termed as work, sex work also had a legitimate claim. The theme of the first conference of sex workers last November was "Sex work is real work, we demand workers rights."

A law reform proposal presented by the Centre for Feminist Legal Research (CFLR) at the conference

said, "We believe that social marginalisation of women in sex work which has occurred over decades cannot be redressed by merely decriminalising prostitution and leaving the rest to take its own course. Statutory recognition of the fact that women in sex work have the same rights as other citizens is essential." CFLR recommended giving statutory recognition to some specific rights which included a provision for women working in brothels to be entitled to all the benefits available under the existing industrial laws and to the facilities and protections available to workers under the existing labour laws, the right to safe working conditions, the right to form collectives, trade unions, associations and have them recognised under the law, apart from basic rights to education, privacy and movement as well as redress mechanisms for their grievances.

*--The Hindu, 14.06.1998*



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## New Law Against Sex Tourists Planned

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An international meet on tourism industry here has suggested framing of a new international law prescribing tougher punishment to deal with the growing menace of sex tourists. The attention of tour operators, travel agents, airlines and hotel industry from 129 countries meeting for the prestigious "World tourism market" was drawn to the menace by British home secretary Jack Straw who called for urgent steps to decisively protect children from being sexually abused by tourists specially from the Western countries.

The sex tourism intruded into the three-day tourism buyers and sellers world meet, when the British home department circulated among more than 5,000 delegates assembled from world-wide leaflets containing information about new British laws to prosecute sex tourists. Similar leaflets were also distributed by some other European Union states. The world tourism market then put the issue up front, organising a number of round-table seminars on sex tourism and decided on suggesting that a new international law be framed to deal with the menace.

According to information circulated among the delegates, Britain has listed over 5,000 to 6,000 known pedophile tourists and some other European nations including Belgium, France, Germany, and Holland over 15,000 known child sex offenders.

India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and some Arab countries have been pointed out as "most favoured destinations of sex tourists" in the leaflets. The Scotland Yard recently launched special workshops in Colombo to train specialist police teams from Sri Lanka and India, Pakistan and Nepal on how to unearth and then deal with child sex offenders.

The brochures specially mentions Goa, Kochi, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and parts of Tamil Nadu as well as whole of island nation of Sri Lanka where "sex tourism was rampant."

The leaflets detail laws in Britain as well in the whole of European Union which make it a criminal offence for any holiday makers from these countries to commit child abuses abroad or to organise "child sex tours."

These clearly bring out that not only can the offenders be caught at destinations in Far East, but would be liable for prosecution in their own countries also. It has asked the assembled travel operators to pass on any information about sex tourists saying that a worldwide dossier was being built about them.

**-Times of India - Mumbai-22.11.1997**



